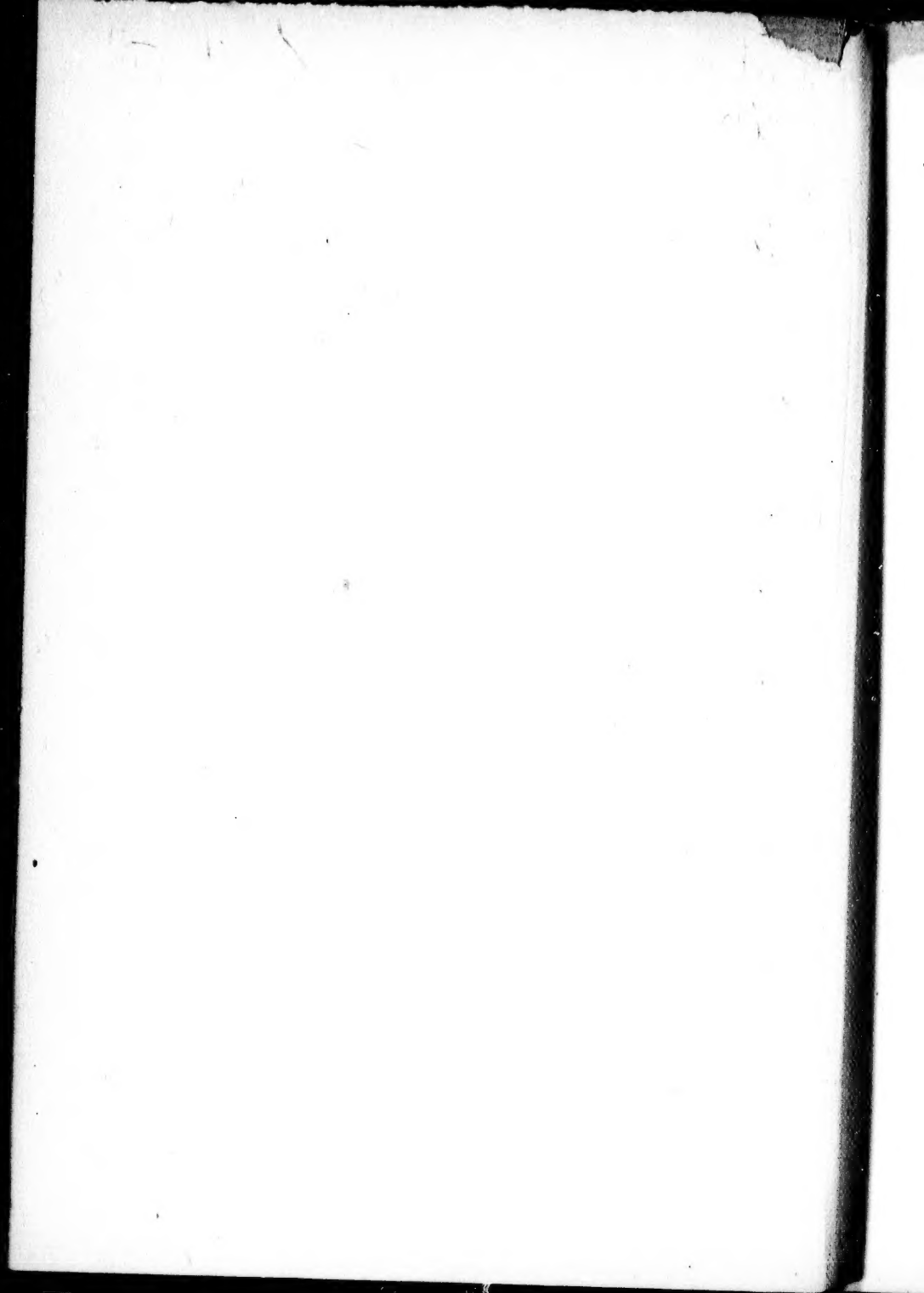


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A SPLENDID SIN



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BY

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Author of

'The Woman who Did'

'The British Barbarians,' etc.

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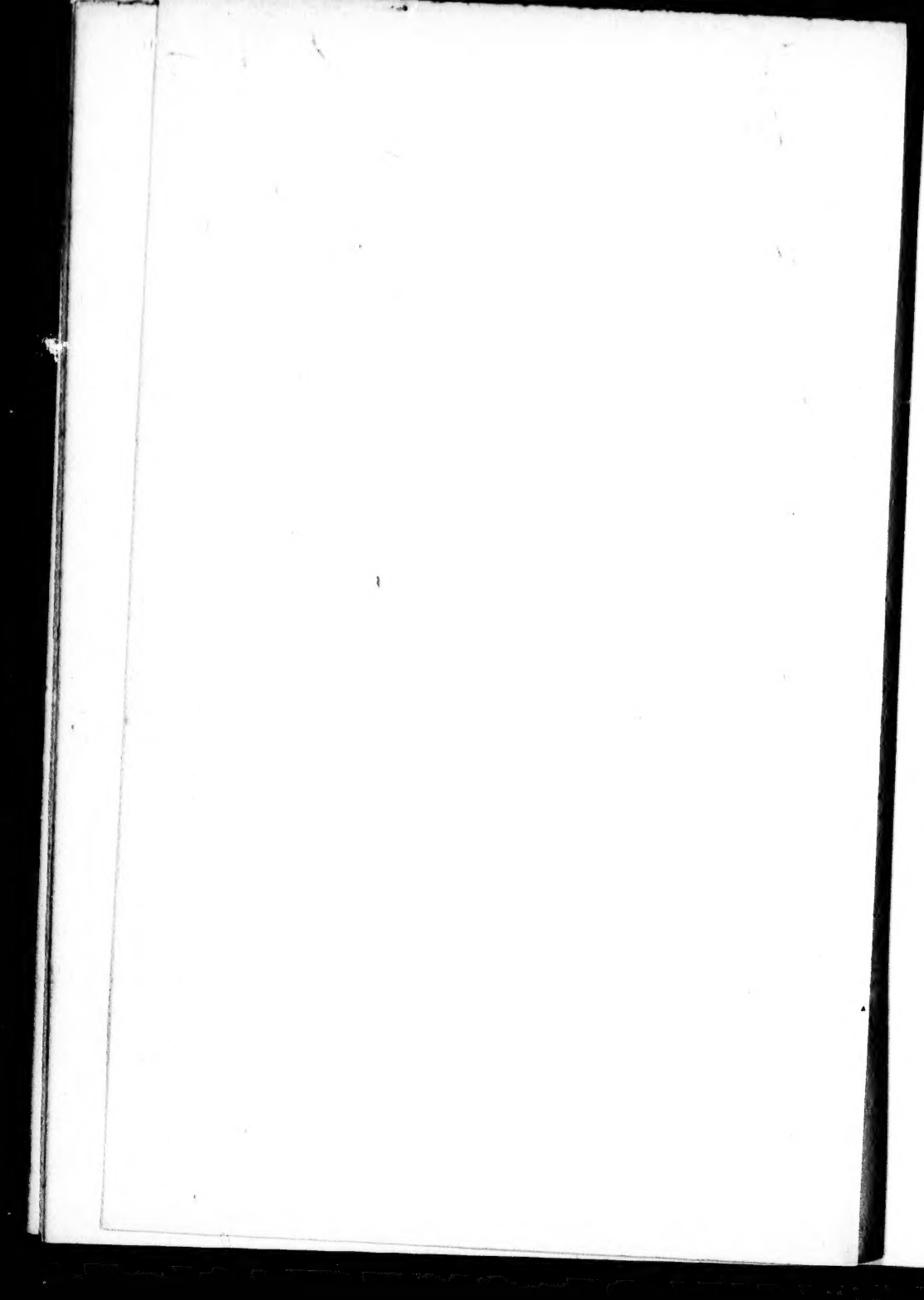
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CHAPTER I

THE BLACK EAGLE

'It's a lovely view,' Mrs Egremont said, with her eyes on the Himmelberg.

Sir Emilius Rawson looked up sharply and surveyed it in a critical mood through his glasses. He did not wish to commit himself. He gave the scene a searching glance, as if it were a doubtful patient, before he ventured upon his diagnosis. 'Yes, it *is* a lovely view,' he admitted at last, after scanning it all over. He made the admission with an air of curious candour, begotten of the habit of seldom granting anything, lest he should afterwards be convicted of possible error. 'It *is* a lovely view!' And he peered up and down, like one who expects to find some dangerous symptom lurking unobserved in some obscure corner.

Not that Sir Emilius was the least interested in the view; he had seen it before, and knew it thoroughly. But it was an instinct with him to look everything steadily in the face for a minute or two before plunging into even the most casual opinion. Use had made it in him a second nature. You had

only to look, indeed, at Sir Emilius's close-shaven face and preoccupied eyes in order to recognise at a glance the fact that he was a great London consulting physician. All big doctors acquire at last that preoccupied air; it grows out of their profession; they pretend to be listening to their patient's recital of unimportant details, while they are really employed in looking behind his words and the mask of his face at such signs of constitution, disease, or temperament as his build and features may chance to indicate. Sir Emilius was bland, like all his class; without blandness of manner and a deferential smile, you cannot succeed in medicine. But even while he folded his scrupulously white hands in front of him, fingers touching and thumbs upright, with an external appearance of the profoundest interest in his patient's life-history (from measles and scarlatina onward), he was inwardly engaged in observing to to himself, 'Strumous type; gouty diathesis: a large eater, a constant drinker of just a couple of glasses more wine than is good for him. General habit of body indicates the Carlsbad treatment. Prominent eyes—a loquacious talker; may as well make up my mind to half-an-hour of him.—Quite so; I follow you; it is one of the well-known sequelæ of influenza.—Wish he'd come to the point. I can see beforehand it's premonitory symptoms of Bright's disease—and the fellow'll waste twenty minutes of my precious time before he even arrives at it!'

For Sir Emilius was famous among men of his profession for his rapid and almost intuitive diagnosis; no doubt it was partly the promptitude with

which he could read other men's faces that gave his own that abiding look of preoccupied boredom. For it is hard, of course, to assume an air of interest in a story whose parallel you have heard ten thousand times before, and every detail of which you could supply by anticipation; yet, if you make a large income by pretending to listen to it, you must needs acquire a professional appearance of intelligent sympathy with every fresh narrator who unfolds his woes to you.

'When a lady of a certain age comes into my consulting-room, settles herself comfortably down, and begins by saying, "Doctor, I am the mother of fourteen children,"' Sir Emilius used often to remark in the privacy of family life, 'I lean back in my arm-chair, fold my hands on my bosom, and close my eyes with a mechanical smile of gentle attention. For I know I shall have to listen to a full account of how all those fourteen children were, jointly and severally, brought into the world, as well as to everything that has happened to their mother in connection with each one of them. I lose consciousness for a moment in a placid doze, from which I awake automatically the moment she says, "And now, doctor, I come to my fourteenth." Then I know I may, perhaps, at last begin to hear why she wants to consult me.'

So now, Sir Emilius gazed around him suspiciously at the pines and the mountains before he ventured at last on the non-committing remark, 'It *is* a fine view, I admit, Julia.'

They were seated on an obtrusively rustic bench

outside the Black Eagle Hotel in the Rothenthal. Sir Emilius was tall, broad-shouldered, a somewhat massive figure—one of those immaculate English gentlemen whose most salient feature appears to be that they tub every morning. He had a close-shaven face, clear-cut features, and an expression that summed up the College of Physicians. No man, indeed, was ever quite so wise as Sir Emilius Rawson looked. He had that studied air of preternatural sagacity which comes only from the assiduous employment of years in impressing your own superior knowledge and skill upon many thousand patients. When he put his hand to his chin, and drew it slowly downward, you felt that he was bringing a gigantic intellect to bear upon the elements of some most difficult problem; when he puckered his forehead and gazed hard at you through his eyeglasses, you realised that the Röntgen rays themselves could not spy out more than he did of your internal skeleton.

His half-sister, who sat beside him, was of different mould. Her air was shrinking. Sir Emilius, who was above everything physiological and modern, accounted for their unlikeness by the racial traits of their respective fathers. His own father, Dr Rawson of Ipswich, was a burly East Anglian who had died when Emilius was a boy of twelve leaving his widow not very well provided for. But Mrs Egremont's father, whom their mother had married in her second trial of matrimony, was a Devonshire squire, endowed with the soft and gentle Devonian nature; he had been completely overshadowed during his married life by the clever-

ness and energy of the woman he had chosen. It was from him, Sir Emilius thought, that Julia inherited her more delicate characteristics. And, indeed, Mrs Egremont had a slender figure and sensitive face, deeply marked with the beauty of some great sorrow. She was still young, as women count youth nowadays—scarcely more than forty, and her features were daintily refined and sympathetic. She was one of those tall and graceful women who attract one at first sight by the moral qualities visible in their faces, and of whom one says at once, 'There is a good woman!'

Mrs Egremont raised her large eyes slowly towards the peak of the Rothspitze. 'Hubert ought to be coming back,' she murmured anxiously. 'He said it was only a six hours' expedition, and he's been gone over seven.'

Sir Emilius lighted a cigarette—he allowed himself the luxury of a cigarette in public at more than fifty miles from London. 'Expeditions invariably take longer than one thinks,' he answered, in a somewhat unconcerned voice. 'Add twenty per cent. to Baedeker's estimate, and you get the fair average. Besides, Hubert took his camera with him, didn't he?'

'He did,' Mrs Egremont answered. 'That, of course, would delay him. Still, I just hate this mountain climbing for him. I hope, when he marries, Fede will make him promise to give it up. It's so horribly dangerous! I watched him through my field-glasses for an hour yesterday, clambering up that bare brown face of rock on the

side of the Eselstein, and it made me giddy to look at him. I assure you, Mill, there wasn't a foothold anywhere. He seemed to me to cling by his eyebrows.'

'These perpendicular cliffs are never quite so steep as they look from a distance,' Sir Emilius went on, calmly. 'Never—or seldom.' It was his habit to hedge, lest he should too rashly have committed himself; for a doctor must always abstain from giving an absolute opinion; 'never to prophesy unless you know,' is the wisdom of the profession. 'When you get at close quarters with them, you find them diversified by little inequalities of surface which enable you to climb; here, a jutting ledge; there, an inconspicuous crack; yonder again, a bush that springs from a cranny by whose aid you can prise yourself up. Hubert's all right; he's as safe a climber as any I ever saw. He has arms and legs exactly adapted for the work of mountaineering. If you notice the muscles of his thumbs and wrists, you'll see at once—'

'Oh, what's that speck on the wall of rock?' Mrs Egremont cried, leaning forward, and lifting her field-glass hurriedly.

'A goat!' Sir Emilius answered, surveying it through his own. 'A most unmitigated goat!—unless, indeed, it's a chamois. And the chamois, I believe, is a mythical beast, like gorgons and hydras and chimeras dire—a mere playful figment of the Swiss imagination. He exists, if at all, in order that the Swiss may carve him in wood during the depths of winter, to sell at an extravagant price

to Cockney tourists in the following season. That's the worst, Julia, of you hens with one chicken. You *can't* be philosophical. Boys *will* be boys; and Hubert is at the age when the desire to climb hereditarily manifests itself. 'Tis a survival from monkeydom. My old enemy, the mother of fourteen, now, has the advantage of you there. *She* is calm and collected. Calmness, in fact, is her prevailing characteristic. She tends, as a rule, to be large and placid. She runs naturally to fat, just as she runs to infants;—a superabundance of the assimilative and accumulative tendencies. When I see her sailing under twenty yards of black silk into my room in Harley Street, I sum her up at once. "My dear madam," I say mentally, "you are a mother of fourteen. You have buried three, and you have survived those shocks with matronly quietude. Your boys are abroad in the world—Matabeleland, Texas, Manitoba, Trinidad—and they give you no anxiety. You are aware that they break their heads; and that heads can be mended. You know they get into scrapes; and that scrapes are things which young fellows crawl out of as easily as they fall in them. You recognise the fact that they will marry horrid creatures; and that, by the end of six months, you and the horrid creature will be the best of friends, having mutually arrived at a *modus vivendi*, based upon the principle of an armed neutrality. You sleep o' nights and you lay on fat still, no matter what happens to you." Whereas, *you*, Julia—*you*, if your boy has gone one hour longer than he says, you grow

visibly thin to the naked eye under the stress of your terrors. Why, you have crows' feet gathering round your eyes this very moment. Too anxious a temperament, my dear; too anxious a temperament! You *can't* expect to keep a young man of twenty-two tied to your apron-string.'

'I don't want to do that,' Mrs Egremont answered, flushing. 'I'm sure, Emilius, I've allowed him to go to Oxford, and to row and swim, and to take to anatomy, and everything of that sort; but this mountain climbing, you know, is so very different. And even in *that* I don't oppose him; I try not to let him see how much it frightens me. I never once say to him, "I wouldn't, if I were you," for fear of seeming to interfere with his pleasures.'

'No, you don't *say* it,' her brother answered, with a masculine smile. 'But, by George, Julia, you *look* it.'

'I'm sorry if I do,' the mother went on, with her eyes fixed steadily on the distant peak. 'I can't bear to let Hubert see he's giving me trouble. Dear boy, I only want to make him happy. And I know we women can't quite understand what a boy wants to do. We would like, of course, to make girls and women of them.'

'Fortunately,' Sir Emilius interposed, 'there's not much danger of your succeeding in that aim with Hubert. He has a fine broad basis of solid manliness to work upon which it would be difficult to feminise. Though, of course, if you could, you would do your best to feminise it.'

'Oh, I hope not!' Mrs Egremont cried. 'My own dear boy! Why, I just love his manliness!'

'Yes, you just love his manliness. Every mother does; and never remembers that it can only be ensured by those very dangers she would like to guard him from. Without breaking of eggs, my dear, there is no omelette. You only want to make him happy. Yet you let him see you live for his happiness. Now, isn't that the way to make him selfish?'

Mrs Egremont shrank back, surprised. 'What, Hubert selfish?' she cried. 'My Hubert selfish? Why, Mill, you can't mean it. Nothing on earth could make Hubert selfish!'

The doctor stroked his chin; professional habits survive even in private life. 'Well, I admit,' he answered, 'that Hubert, up to date, is one of the most affectionate and unselfish young fellows I ever came across. I allow he's wrapped up in you. Never knew a boy think more of his mother—as, of course, he ought to do, for you've been a perfect angel to him. Still, it can't be good for him to see that you are always thinking of him, and watching over him, and planning his happiness. He's a good lad, I admit, and, as the stock phrase goes, he has never given you one minute's anxiety—though he's never ceased for one minute to be an anxiety to you. He's unselfish by nature, I grant. That he takes from *you*; for you're about the most unselfish woman I ever came across, Julia; and I've known you for forty-four years, and am in a position to judge of you. Still, consider the other side. These things are hereditary. Every man is liable, sooner or later, to show *some* traits, at least, that recall his father.'

Mrs Egremont's cheek burned bright crimson. 'His father!' she exclaimed, with a sudden fall in her voice. 'His father! His father!' Then, after a moment, the glow dying away, she added, in a lower tone, 'Ah, yes; I forgot; his father!'

'Walter was the most selfish pig I ever knew in my life,' Sir Emilius continued, with the frankness of family confidence.

Mrs Egremont leaned forward with an impatient wave of the hand. 'Oh, don't talk of him!' she cried. 'I am only happy—when I forget about him, Emilius.'

Sir Emilius paused. He took a puff or two at his cigarette. Then he resumed the conversation. 'Still, you *must* realise,' he said, slowly, 'that if Hubert takes after *you* in some things, he must equally take after Walter in others. And Walter being a conspicuously selfish man, anything that tends to encourage selfishness in Hubert ought surely to be avoided.'

Mrs Egremont paused too. For some minutes she seemed to turn the matter over in her mind. The doctor's eyes were fixed steadily upon her. He was reading her through and through, and she knew it perfectly. She trembled under his glance. He could see into one's brain. But at last she broke silence. 'I suppose,' she said, hesitating, 'certain characteristics of one parent, Emilius, tend rather to come out in children, and certain of the other. Now, Hubert's father was undoubtedly, at least, a very able man; he was a man of intellect. And Hubert has intellect—far more intellect than he could ever have derived

from *me*. Well, then, isn't it possible—I don't know, I put the question to you only as a physiologist—isn't it possible that Hubert might take intellectually after his father, and emotionally after me? Might he not reproduce his father's brains without—without reproducing any moral defects his father may have exhibited?'

'*May* have exhibited. Why, Julia,' Sir Emilius exclaimed, smiling, 'how unnecessarily mild is your way of putting it! You know as well as I do what sort of man Walter really was. Could Hubert inherit any kind of good quality from him—other than intellectual?'

Mrs Egremont bowed her head. Again she was silent. 'Don't let's talk of it,' she cried at last; 'I can't bear to think about it.'

Sir Emilius rose from his place with great deliberation, and lighted another cigarette. 'Selfishest pig I ever knew in my life,' he murmured to himself in a very slow drawl, as he paced up and down in front of the seat. 'But Julia's quite right! Hubert doesn't take after him. This one-sided heredity is common enough, after all. Judge a man as a whole, and he's half his father and half his mother. But *which* half of each will come out in each part—why, that's more than physiology at present can decide for us!'

Mrs Egremont rose too. 'Emilius,' she cried, faltering, 'I can't stand it any longer. This suspense wears me out. I *must* go and meet him!'

'By all means,' Sir Emilius answered. 'One walk

like another! He's as safe as houses, of course. But we'll go and meet him.'

'It was so black on the Eselstein once this afternoon,' the mother added, after a forced pause. 'He may have been caught in a thunderstorm.'

'Clouds designed in sepia,' Sir Emilius admitted. 'But he'll come to no harm. An expert climber like Hubert! Cats have nine lives, they say: boys have ten, I fancy.'

He walked on a pace or two, then he began again. 'Hubert has intellect,' he said, 'undoubted intellect. But it's badly compounded. The worst of him is, he's half a poet and half a physiologist. Now, you can't drive poetry and physiology tandem.'

'Hubert drives them abreast,' Mrs Egremont retorted, gently. 'And, to my mind, they go very well in harness.'

CHAPTER II

A FLORENTINE NOBLEMAN

THE Black Eagle in the Rothenthal is one of those old-fashioned Swiss hotels which lie a little off the beaten track of tourists. The season was autumn, and the crop of visitors was nearly all garnered. On the verandah of the inn the concierge stood lounging, with his cap on one side, a cheap Swiss cigar stuck carelessly in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets. Nobody else stood about except a single chambermaid, in the Bernese dress now confined to her occupation. The concierge nodded. 'Season's over,' he murmured.

'Never knew it close so early,' the chambermaid answered.

'Bad weather in England,' the concierge replied. 'Keeps them from coming south. Fine on the Italian lakes. Keeps them from coming north. I'm off to Nice, Rosa, if this sort of thing goes on much longer.'

'Well, *I* don't mind it,' Rosa answered, with a saucy air. 'A little relief after the hurry and scurry! I'm engaged till the thirtieth, come visitors or come nobody.'

'Ah, the patron engages you so; but *I'm* by the

week,' the concierge continued; 'and as things go now, there's no tips worth speaking of.'

'Well, I don't mind for that,' Rosa answered. 'I've made a good season—and I want to stop on here as long as I can; for I'm doing my winter at Naples, where my term doesn't begin before the 10th of November. So of course it suits me best to hang on here and take it easy. There's nobody left on my floor now, except those English in Number Twenty.'

'Ten coming to-morrow,' the concierge said, briefly.

'Yes, but only Cookies. They give more trouble than *pourboire*, those Cook's tourists.'

'Too many Cooks spoil the Continent,' the concierge murmured, reflectively. 'If it weren't for the Americans—'

Rosa drew herself up suddenly. She was a transformed woman. The easy-going air of the chambermaid-at-large gave way at once to the official demeanour of the chambermaid-in-waiting. At the same moment a similar transformation came over the concierge. He pulled his cap straight, hid his cigar in his palm, and assumed the severely well-bred air which is the badge of his position. Anyone could guess that strangers were coming. And, as a matter of fact, it was the roll of carriage-wheels that had wrought this metamorphosis. A Family was arriving. 'Must be those stingy Italians who telegraphed for rooms on the third floor from Milan,' Rosa murmured, pulling her Bernese bodice straight, and arranging her hair in the most approved fashion. 'He calls himself a Marquis; but he wants on *salon*! Just like those Italians!'

The concierge rang the big bell. All at once, from the recesses of the kitchen and dining-room, a whole posse of waiters in very white ties and very black coats swarmed out like ants, to take their stand on the steps and welcome the new-comers. The patron himself, all cringing obsequiousness, one wrinkled smile, stood at the top of the flight and rubbed his hands in expectation: the waiters and chambermaids, the boots and porters, all stood at attention in their various positions. As the carriage with the 'stingy Italians' drew up at the foot of the steps, the concierge advanced, all servility, to greet them; while the landlord, representative of the only real aristocracy in modern Switzerland, bowed his profoundest bow from the top of the flight to the prospective customers.

The concierge took the rugs and umbrellas as they descended. 'For 70,' he observed in an undertone to the porter. 'Take that bag down, Karl! The lady's parasol, Rosa! Alphonse, the portmanteau!'

A stout but well-built Italian gentleman rose from his seat in a leisurely manner. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with very big moustaches and a bushy black beard, and his appearance was that of a born aristocrat. He smiled a bland smile of somewhat cynical amusement. 'Received, as usual, by the whole strength of the company,' he said, in his soft Tuscan, turning round to his pretty young daughter who accompanied him. 'We shall have to pay for it, Fede! No pay, no politeness; nothing in Switzerland without paying through the nose for it!' Then he went on in good colloquial German

to the concierge, 'I telegraphed from Milan for rooms for myself and my daughter. I hope you have reserved them. The Marchese and Marchesa Tornabuoni.' He said the last words with just a touch of pomposity.

'Sì, signore,' the concierge answered in Italian, anxious to show he had fully understood that part of the colloquy which was *not* intended for him,—and politer than usual in order to disprove its libellous insinuations. 'Your rooms are ready for you. Will your excellency and the Signora Marchesa give yourselves the trouble to mount at once to them?'

'A lift?' the Marchese inquired, raising his eyebrows.

'Sì, signore; a lift and electric light; we made the installation for both this season.'

'Looks comfortable, Fede,' the Marchese went on, under his breath, shaking off the first layer of the dust of travel. '*Pouf!* that St Gottard is dusty enough for anything; but the road here from Goeschenen—my faith, what clouds! I shall never be clean again!'

'I wonder Hubert wasn't here to meet us,' Fede observed, glancing round her. She was a tall girl of eighteen, with abundant dark hair and a dusky complexion; yet bright-coloured and rosy, with the ingenuous beauty of young southern girls in the opening rosebud stage of development.

'Hubert here to meet us!' the Marchese exclaimed, gazing about him in return. 'Hubert here to meet us. Not if *I* can help it! My child, how foolish

of you! No, no, I took good care to prevent such a mischance. I wrote particularly that we would not arrive at Rothenthal till to-morrow. Why, what is the girl thinking of? Your hair is full of dust; you're as brown as a myrtle-berry; you're flushed and blown about; your hat's on one side; and your dress doesn't look the least bit becoming. No pure-blooded Italian girl would ever dream of appearing in such a state as yours before her innamorato. That's the English blood in you—your poor dear mother's blood—and the English training!

Fede's face grew still redder. 'But I should have *liked* him to be here,' she said, simply. 'And he would have been here, of course, if he'd known I was coming.'

'No doubt,' her father answered, with the same cynical smile. 'To prevent which misfortune, my poor dear innocent, I wrote we would arrive by mid-day to-morrow, and so secured you time to put your hair straight and wash your face and hands before meeting your lover. We know nothing as yet of his position and prospects; but *if* he's a proper person to marry you at all, it's as well you should make a good first impression upon him and his family.'

'I don't feel like that to Hubert,' Fede answered, smiling. 'Hubert is—well, in England, you know, it's all so different.'

'But we are *not* in England,' the Marchese replied, biting the end of his moustache. 'So now go to your room and make yourself presentable. A girl should always look her best before her lover—until she's married him. Here, concierge, one moment!'

‘Signore!’

‘Is there a Mr Egremont in the house?’

‘Yes, signore; and Mrs Egremont, his mother; and Sir Emilius Rawson; all three of them English.’

‘Then don’t tell them we’ve arrived. We’ll go up to our rooms now, and see them later.’

‘Is Mr Egremont in the hotel at present?’ Fede interposed, all crimson.

‘No, signora, not at this moment. He started for a trip up the Eselstein this morning, and has not yet returned. His mother and uncle have gone out to meet him.’

‘That’s well,’ the Marchese answered. ‘Go up to your room at once, Fede. You’re a perfect fright at present. It would be absolutely fatal to your chance of marriage if your Uberto were to see you.’

Fede went off to the lift; the Marchese followed her. Rosa showed them to their rooms as obsequiously as if they were not ‘stingy Italians.’ Fede unpacked her portmanteau and did her hair as desired. They had come over from Milan that day, and driven across from Goeschenen. Yet she was not tired. In scenery like that, she thought, she could never get tired. Besides, had she not come to meet Hubert once more? And though she was naturally nervous as to what papa might think of Hubert, and what Hubert might think of papa, she was absolutely happy at the thought of meeting him. Her cheek was flushed with quite unusual roses, and her eye was bright, when she went out on the balcony. Her father was there before her, smoking his inevitable cigar, and gazing rather

lazily across at the mountains. Even after all the glorious scenery she had come through that day, the view delighted Fede. 'Oh, papà,' she cried, gazing out upon it, 'did you ever in your life see anything so lovely?'

The Marchese waved his cigar over the field of view with Italian demonstrativeness. 'Why, yes, my child,' he answered. 'Dozens of times. At home, on our estate at Florence.' He punctuated each phrase with a puff and a wave. 'For my part, I consider a basking Tuscan hillside—covered with a good terraced Chianti vineyard—a vast deal more attractive than all this useless snow and ice and pinewood.'

'Papà,' Fede cried, clasping her hands, 'you've *no* sense of the picturesque!'

'So your mother used to say, my dear. And perhaps I haven't. I'm a man of business. But I believe you allow these Swiss to bamboozle you, as they bamboozle everybody.' The Marchese sank his voice to a confidential whisper. 'My dear, the Swiss are an extremely clever commercial nation. They manage to delude all the rest of the world in a most extraordinary fashion.'

Fede's eyes were far away upon the cloud-topped peaks, now just beginning to glow with the pink light of sunset. 'Delude them?' she murmured. 'How do you mean, delude them?'

The Marchese took a puff or two, and then continued deliberately. 'It was a fellow called De Saussure,' he said, 'who first hit upon the principle—a very clever fellow, as you may naturally imagine.

You see, Switzerland, to start with, was a poor and out-of-the-way pastoral country. It lived on pasture. The Swiss produce a quantity of beef, and mutton, and milk, and cream, and eggs, and butter—and they don't know what to do with them. There they are, stuck in the very middle of the map of Europe—remote from the consumer—remote from all the great markets—Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna, Naples; and they can't afford to send their stuff away by rail, because it wouldn't even pay the cost of carriage. They have plenty to eat—and nobody to eat it. So, happy thought—as they can't send their produce away to the consumer, they must make the consumer come to their produce. Naturally, however, there was nothing in the world to bring people of their own free wills to these inhospitable wilds; but that difficulty didn't daunt the ingenious Switzers. They *invented scenery*—and the rest of the world fell into the trap like lambs, and came to Switzerland to eat the beef, and stare at the mountains!' And the Marchese puffed away, with eyes half-closed, well pleased at his own philosophical cleverness.

'But, papa, they're so *beautiful*!' Fede cried, clasping her hands ecstatically.

'What, the Swiss?'

'No, no, of course not; the mountains! Look at them now, turning crimson in the setting sun. *Aren't* they just lovely?'

The Marchese shrugged his shoulders. 'People didn't look at crags in the eighteenth century, he replied, with his two hands extended in a rhetorical

gesture. 'The Swiss hadn't then developed the scenery business. Glaciers were not as yet the fashion. Everybody in those days used sensibly to admire fine open stretches of cultivable land—like the plain of Lombardy as you see it from the top of Milan Cathedral. That was before the time of Monsieur de Saussure, who discovered the commercial value of these uninteresting Alps. Putting up statues is a precious bad way of investing your money, or else I suspect the grateful Swiss would have put up a statue to De Saussure long ago. But they're a prudent people; they never do anything except with a single eye to remunerative investment.'

'Oh, papa,' Fede cried, 'you're incorrigible. I believe you only care for our own lovely place on the Arno for the sake of the wine and oil you make in it.'

'My dear,' the Marchese answered, with the common sense of the modern Italian, 'in spite of the present depressed condition of the wine market, my Chianti fetches the highest price in the English ports of any brand in Tuscany, and that's quite enough for me. I leave the picturesque to those who care for it.'

'But these mountains!' Fede cried, stretching her arms towards them impulsively.

The Marchese spread his hands. 'Mere anfractuosities in the earth's crust,' he answered. 'They would make much more land, ironed out and distributed.'

Fede laughed in spite of herself. 'You're a degenerate Tornabuoni, dear,' she said, half in jest, half

in earnest. 'I'm sure Giovanni Tornabuoni, who had the pictures painted by Ghirlandajo in the choir of Santa Maria Novella, wouldn't have thought as you do.'

'Very probably not,' her father replied, patting her head. 'But he would have burnt you for a heretic, my dear; so there are advantages both ways. I don't pretend, myself, that I live outside my own century.'

Fede's eyes were far away on the rose-tipped peaks. 'I'm glad,' she said, slowly, 'I'm not as practical as you, papa. Hubert loves the mountains—I mean the anfractuosities—and I love them too. And that will be nice for Hubert. I don't think Englishmen are so practical as Italians; though in England, of course, everybody thinks differently.'

'In England,' her father observed, leaning over the parapet and puffing away reflectively, 'everybody thinks the average Italian is a judicious mixture of an operatic tenor, an organ-grinder, a Calabrian brigand, and a Neapolitan macaroni-seller. The Italian of real life is little known, even to Englishmen who have lived long in Italy.'

'That's true,' Fede replied. 'For, as a matter of fact, the Italians I have met have all been intensely practical, while the English I have met, no matter how business-like, have always had some under-current at least in their natures of romance and poetry.'

'Too true,' the Marchese murmured. 'Too true, I fear, Fede. Your good mother was an English-

woman, and for romantic—well, you remember her. In that, you show yourself your mother's daughter. I send you to England to be educated, because it was her dying wish, and also because an Italian girl in Florence has far better chances of marrying an Englishman of fortune than a Florentine of equal means and of suitable position. And you come back telling me you are in love with "Hubert." "Who is Hubert?" I naturally ask; and you answer me, "His other name is Egremont. Isn't it a pretty one?—so soft, Hubert Egremont!" "Very soft," I admit, "but his fortune, his prospects, his family, Fede?" And you reply, "His family lives in Devonshire, the loveliest part of England, with beautiful red cliffs and purple bays and green valleys." "How many acres of it does he own?" I ask. You have never even inquired. I tear my hair, but I get no further. Your information about him sums itself up in the two simple facts that he has a pretty name and is an agreeable person. I ask you, *is* that practical?

Fede looked down and smiled, a little embarrassed smile, while she fingered the rose at her bosom somewhat nervously. 'I saw so little of him, you see, papa,' she answered, lowering her eyes. 'We— we only met, at most, half-a dozen times. And then, you know, we had so much else to talk about!'

'Yes, *I* know,' the Marchese answered, more amused than provoked, for he had Italian tolerance for the foibles of the young. '*I* know, exactly. You and Hubert went on talking pretty nothings to one another, and making love for love's sake,

precisely as if it were an intrigue, not a marriage, you were contemplating. A pure-blooded Italian girl wouldn't behave like that, you know—not with a man she thought of making her husband. A married woman with her lover, I grant you—very right and proper; but a marriage is different; 'tis an affair of business. You have to take this man—he has to take this woman—for life and always. Therefore it becomes important to know precisely how much each can contribute to the family exchequer, and what sort of fortune each expects and possesses. If you were *my* daughter only, you would have inquired these things first about your precious Hubert. As you are also your mother's, and have imbibed all sorts of romantic English ideas at Oxford, you inquire nothing of the sort; you merely come telling me that Hubert is charming, high-souled, handsome, clever, intellectual. Are *those* the qualities, I ask you, one demands in a husband?'

'They are—in England,' Fede answered, half smiling. For the Marchese, though practical, was a kindly-natured father.

'And what's the consequence?' the Italian went on, holding one hand out oratorically. 'I write to England, delicately suggesting these important preliminaries, and am met with a reserve which, I suppose, proceeds from English refinement, but which, in Italy, we should consider absurd and impracticable. We should call it mere shuffling. You tell me you're "engaged," whatever that may mean, to Hubert. So I have no resource left except

to write and inquire when and where I may meet Mr Hubert. And where does the man propose to give me an appointment? In Paris, Milan, Florence, Venice, London, where either party could have access to proper legal opinions? Not a bit of it; he says he and his mother will be touring in Switzerland, and they will be delighted to meet us half-way, at a second-rate inn, in a sequestered valley, remote from all the conveniences and resources of civilisation—they discuss the affair as though the element of *contract* didn't enter into the question. And *that's* what poses as a practical people! Pah! *cara mia*, it makes me ill to think of it!

Fede smiled in turn. She had spent the five formative years of her life in England, first at school, and then at Somerville College; and though she was Italian still in speech and features, she was English to the core in her ideas and opinions. 'That's not quite the way people would look at it in England—' she began.

'I know it's not,' the Marchese interrupted, good-humouredly; 'and that's just what I complain of!'

'They would think,' Fede went on, 'this was an affair between two lovers, and that nothing could be more natural than for the lovers to settle it among these beautiful mountains and these lovely valleys, where the people most concerned could find abundant opportunities for seeing one another alone—after the English fashion.'

'Precisely,' her father echoed. 'After the English fashion! In England, a marriage is still, to a great

extent, an affair of the heart ; in Italy, we see that it is an affair of the pocket.'

'Then I'm glad,' Fede murmured, 'I'm going to marry an Englishman!'

'Oh, well,' the Marchese replied, shrugging his shoulders once more, 'as you seem to have decided the question for yourself, without even so much as an inquiry as to your father, I really don't know why I should have come all this way merely to give my consent to a preconceived arrangement, as to the terms of which I have not even been consulted!'

Fede took his hand in hers. 'Dear papa,' she cried, 'you know I couldn't bear to do anything to displease you. You have always been the sweetest and best of fathers. You've been goodness itself to me. But Hubert is so nice, so kind, so lovable ; I'm sure when you see him you can't help loving him.'

The Marchese smiled in spite of himself. 'Loving him!' he exclaimed, much amused. 'There you are again, Fede. You insist upon treating it all as if it were a mere affair of passing affection. You forget it is proposed you should *marry* this man. And we don't yet know whether he has anything to marry upon.'

'I would marry him without a penny,' Fede exclaimed, impulsively.

'No doubt,' the Marchese replied ; 'and come back upon me in three years, without a penny, but with a couple of babies! Remember, Fede, I have the two boys to provide for. Luigi must have his allowance for the army ; Carlo must continue to cultivate the family estate ; so where I am to find any but the

most modest dowry for *you*, I'm sure I don't know. The first thing to be settled—the very first thing—is the question how much this young man is worth, and what arrangement he proposes to make for you. I shall speak of that at once—the first thing when I see them.'

Fede drew back, crimson-cheeked. 'Oh, papa,' she cried, 'I beg of you—not this evening!'

'Why not, my child? It's most proper and business-like.'

'Business-like! That's just it! Wait till to-morrow at least,' Fede pleaded, all her English feelings in revolt at the suggestion of such precipitancy.

'What, my dear, and let you spend an evening with him in my presence, on the footing of your future husband, before I've inquired whether the arrangement is practicable? My child, it would be impossible!'

Fede hesitated for a moment. Then a brilliant idea struck her. 'Well, let us be business-like,' she answered, conforming as far as she could to her father's standpoint. 'After all, they *are* English; and you must deal with Rome as Rome expects to be dealt with. If you speak to them to-night they will think it precipitate, and—and vulgar—and mercenary. They are not accustomed in England to that way of doing things. If you say out at once to them—"How much is he worth?" you will only succeed in setting them against you. Now, I don't know whether Hubert is rich or poor; I—I had too many other things to discuss the few times I saw him—for you know it was all a very sudden engagement.

But perhaps he *is* rich—so many English are; and at anyrate he was an Oxford man, which means a good deal, you know, in England. Wouldn't it be better worth while to wait just one night, and find out to-morrow, than to create a bad impression on a man who, after all, may be what you yourself would consider a very suitable son-in-law?'

She said it with a pretty smile, which showed at once how far she was modifying her own mode of thought to suit her father's; and when Fede Torna-buoni smiled, she was simply irresistible. The Marchese looked at her with admiring eyes; he was proud and fond of her. 'You're a clever little humbug,' he answered, after a moment, 'and I know you don't mean it. But still, there's something in what you say. I know these English and their absurd romanticisms. Well, let it be as you wish. 'Tis the true Tuscan way, *domane, domane!*'

They were bending over the second-floor window as they spoke, and the concierge was lounging on a garden bench below. Suddenly the Marchese leaned down and addressed him. 'What mountain did you say Mr Egremont had ascended to-day?' he inquired, with a curious air of interest.

'Signore the Eselstein.'

'Most appropriate name!—the Donkeys' Crag. Alone?'

'With a guide and two companions.'

The Marchese turned to Fede. 'With a guide!' he murmured complacently. 'That looks like money!'

'Hubert always did everything nicely,' Fede

answered, with rapture; 'and he dressed, oh, just charmingly!'

'What rooms?' the Marchese called out again.

'A *salon* and three bedrooms on the first floor,' the concierge answered. Then he added, maliciously, 'They are *very* nice people.'

'Which means, they spend money freely,' the Marchese murmured lower, aside to Fede. 'Still, that may be only their brag. They may think you're an heiress, and well worth catching.'

'Oh, papa, Hubert's not like that,' Fede answered, indignantly.

'They never are, my dear—till you find them out,' her father replied, with his cynical smile. 'Well, well, we shall see. On the whole, though, I rather like the look of your Hubert.'

And on the verandah below, the concierge was observing that moment to Rosa, 'Beggary Italians, I expect, come here to marry their daughter off to a wealthy Englishman! Not much to be made out of *them*, I feel sure. He put the price he wanted to pay for rooms in his telegram.'

'*She's* all right,' Rosa answered, with a nod. '*She's* half English, I can see; but he's a regular Italian. Sort of man who'd stop at a hotel for six weeks, and then give you a franc at the end when he was leaving! I made my last winter season at Rome, and I had enough of them, I promise you. The year before, at the Paradis at Cannes, all the world was English, and the tips were just splendid. But at Rome—my hotel was Italian to the core, and, my faith, it *was* starvation!'

CHAPTER III

ENTER HUBERT

A SHORT mile from the inn, Mrs Egremont and Sir Emilius had come upon Hubert. The climber of peaks was walking alone, having dropped his guide at the village, while his two temporary companions had diverged by themselves from the base of the crag in the opposite direction, meaning to sleep, they said, at the Rhone Glacier.

The mother's heart leaped up with pride as Hubert approached her. How carelessly handsome he looked in his mountaineering suit, swinging his stick as he went—how lithe, how supple! No costume sets a man off like flannel shirt and running-trousers, and Hubert was attired for a light climb below snow-level in that easy fashion. He was a well-built young fellow, after the English pattern, almost arrogantly healthy. Mrs Egremont had never felt prouder of him before; so tall, so fresh, so strong—so like his father!

He hallooed to them from afar. 'Not alarmed, I hope, mother?'

Mrs Egremont prevaricated. 'We thought we might as well stroll this way as any other,' she

answered with a gasp, gulping down her inner joy and delight at recovering him. But she sank on a grassy knoll by the side of the path, and surveyed him with great eyes of relief and tenderness.

Hubert flung himself by her side on a bed of short clover. 'Oh, it's nothing of a climb,' he cried, reassuring her. 'We just walked up and down. As easy as running. Quite a baby of a peak. Like Primrose Hill, I assure you.'

'Like Primrose Hill!' Sir Emilius echoed, with an incredulous laugh. 'I looked at it through my glasses this morning, Julia—all ramping teeth of rock—and I call it a pretty stiff piece of climbing. My dear, that boy will stick a notice on the Jungfrau—"This hill is dangerous to cyclists."'

'Anybody else on the summit?' Mrs Egremont inquired with forced interest, trying her best to seem occupied with that hateful climbing; though, to be honest, the one thing she ever cared to learn about a mountain jaunt was that her boy had got back again.

'Crowds of them!' Hubert answered. 'A perfect Piccadilly!' He plucked a long grass and bit at it as he spoke. 'Ten people on the Eselstein!'

'And you got some new specimens?' Mrs Egremont continued, with a wistful glance at his tin collecting case.

Hubert opened the little box. 'Two or three Alpine beetles,' he answered—'rather odd varieties; and a pretty gentian that's new to me. But I had to scramble for it; a cleft in the rock; I slipped and hung on, and cut my fingers in clinging.' He held them up—lacerated.

'Oh, Hubert,' his mother cried, shrinking back in spite of herself, 'how can you bear to risk your life for nothing?'

'There was *no* risk, mother. A mere drop of ten feet. If I fell, I lighted on a perfect feather-bed of scented daphne. But I wanted the plant, because I rather think it's a hybrid, and these natural hybrids are always interesting. They give one such clues to the workings of heredity.'

The mother fingered the plant with a sort of mute horror, as she might have fingered some sentient thing—an asp or a cobra—that had tried to lure her boy into danger. But she uttered not a word. She had schooled herself never to let Hubert see how deeply these mountain excursions terrified her.

'And the view?' she asked again, with maternal hypocrisy. Earth holds no hypocrite like your loving mother.

The poet in Hubert blossomed out. 'The view,' he said, 'was ineffable! I was in luck's way, mother—we happened on a thunderstorm! It played all round us. Great dragons of black cloud flung themselves with huge claws and folds against the walls of the peak; we looked down upon them from above, and saw them shatter and destroy themselves on the precipices. They surged up, darkling, one after another, with curled tails and rampant backs, and rushed madly against the Eselstein. There they broke themselves in lightning as a wave breaks in foam. Great seas of white mist filled up the valleys. But away to the south, one strip of pale, blue sky

broke the field of black ; and against it, the Zermatt peaks stood out white and calm, showing their teeth with a smile, as if they disdained the thunder. They almost seemed to laugh at it—just a curl of contempt, no more, as to a base inferior. I never saw anything grander than the contrast between the blind rage of the storm-clouds, and the unheeding serenity of the placid Alps, smiling down on them with their white teeth, just touched with sunbeams.'

'But it was dangerous, surely?' Mrs Egremont exclaimed—and ~~then~~ hated herself for saying it. 'Alone, at that height, with the lightning all round you.'

'It was *grand*, I know,' Hubert answered, gazing up at the rosy glow on the summit of the Himmelsberg. 'You could see it playing about the smaller peaks, while the glacier-clad heights and white crystalline needles rose perfectly unconcerned into the dazzling sunlight.'

'Capital for those who like it!' Sir Emilius put in, drily. 'But you must have got wet, Hubert; though at your age ~~getting~~ seems to promote digestion.'

There was a minute's pause, during which Mrs Egremont gazed at her son fondly.

'Fede not come, I suppose?' Hubert began again, stretching himself and fondling his muscle.

'Why, no,' Sir Emilius interposed. 'We don't expect them till to-morrow.'

'I know that; but I thought—'

'Yes, lovers *will* think things,' Sir Emilius said, sardonically.

'I thought perhaps Fede would beg her father not to sleep at Milan, but come straight through by the morning train; and then of course she'd be disappointed if I was not at the inn when she arrived, to meet her.'

Sir Emilius smiled the wise smile of middle age. 'Much more likely she'd want to get a good night's rest,' he remarked, 'so as to look fresh and well before she met you. I've three girls of my own, and I know the ways of them.'

'Milly and Hilda and Effie—oh, yes,' Hubert said, with just a tinge of disrespect; 'but then, Fede's quite different.'

'They always *are* quite different!' Sir Emilius admitted. 'Everybody's girl is the one girl in the world. "There is none like her, none," says Tennyson's lover in Maud; which shows, not that Maud was an exceptional creature, but that Tennyson had independently arrived at the same generalisation as to the psychology of lovers.'

Hubert lay back on the grass and surveyed the sky for a while in silence. Then he addressed himself to his mother. 'I often think,' he said, in a very musing voice, 'how wonderfully all these things are ordered. It almost makes one believe at times in the old idea of an over-ruling providence.'

'I never left off believing in that old idea,' Mrs Egremont murmured, gently.

Hubert clasped her hand in his. 'That's your charm,' he said, with real tenderness. 'In spite of everything, mother, you still believe in the universe!

And really it almost looks like deliberate design, when you think of the strange coincidences which had to exist before I could ever arrange things with Fede.'

'As which?' Sir Emilius asked, with a sceptical twinkle. Sir Emilius declined to believe in anything.

'Oh, I'm not talking to *you*, Uncle Mill,' the young man answered, half flushing with pride. 'I'm talking to my mother. And you see, mother, I could never have fallen so much in love with Fede if she hadn't been a Florentine. To be Dante's fellow-townswoman, you know—what a privilege! It's the Italian strain in her that gives her half her attractiveness, and the English the other half. Then, I couldn't have met her if she hadn't come to England. And if her mother hadn't happened to be an Englishwoman married to an Italian, Fede would never have been sent to Oxford. Again, if I had taken that scholarship at Trinity instead of at Balliol, I would have settled down at Cambridge, and therefore never have met Fede. So see by how beautiful a concatenation of events it's all been arranged that Fede and I, the exact two people intended by nature for one another, should meet at the right time, and spring at one another like magnet to magnet.'

Mrs Egremont sighed. A thought flashed through her mind. 'The very words,' she said to herself, 'his father would have spoken!' And she sighed inaudibly.

But the man of science was up in arms at once.

'Now, for a physiologist,' Sir Emilius said, with didactic forefinger—'and you *are* a physiologist—I call that about as absurd an idea as ever was ventilated. Unsubstantial, gaseous! What's the matter with *you* is, that the poet in you keeps getting the better of the anatomist. Can't you see, my dear Hubert, the instinct is the only fundamental reality in all this business?—the instinct to mate and to continue the species? The particular object on which it expends itself is all pure accident. A bud reaches the stage at which the flower *must* expand, and it expands accordingly. A man reaches the stage at which he *must* fall in love, and he falls in love accordingly. There's no more in it than that—a common result of pure human heredity.'

'But not every girl—' Hubert began.

Sir Emilius snapped his fingers with subdued impatience. 'Don't talk nonsense to me, sir,' he said. 'It's as plain as a pikestaff. You fall in love with the girls you see; I know that very well. How the dickens can you fall in love with the girls you *don't* see?' And he snapped his jaw firmly.

Hubert gazed up at the sky through his half-closed eyelids. Red rifts of cloud flecked it.

'My dear uncle,' he answered, 'if the poet in *me* gets the better of the anatomist, doesn't the anatomist in *you* get the better of the poet? Quite too much the better? Can't you see in turn that the world you ignore is every bit as real, every bit as important, as the world you acknowledge?'

Sir Emilius shook his head. 'No, I can't,' he

responded, testily. 'I say, you fell in love with the little Italian girl *because* you met her; you didn't meet her because you were predestined by nature to fall in love with her.'

Hubert turned the subject. He was a consistent determinist, and it is not worth while for determinists to argue. 'My one fear now,' he said, 'is about the Marchese.'

'So is mine.' Sir Emilius assented with promptitude.

'A Florentine gentleman of the oldest descent,' Hubert mused on, stroking his mother's hand in his. 'It seems so presumptuous of me!'

'To take his daughter off his hands,' Sir Emilius answered, smiling. 'I didn't mean quite what *you* mean, Hubert. A Florentine nobleman is generally poor, and always grasping. I meant I had my doubts as to his solvency and respectability.' For Sir Emilius, being a true-born Briton, had a low opinion of mere Foreigners.

'Why, the Tornabuoni were great folk in Florence,' Hubert cried, astonished, 'when the Egremonts were nothing more than Lancashire farmers! He may consider me—as I am—whole worlds beneath Fede.'

'He may think small beer of our English gentility no doubt,' Sir Emilius answered, 'but he'll think precious well of our English consols, you may be certain, Hubert. They touched 114 yesterday, I see by the *Standard*. I know these Florentines, my boy; and you may take my word for it they are *not* the romantic Italians of Covent Garden

opera. They know the precise worth of twenty shillings sterling in King Humbert's currency to half a centesimo.'

'Well, I'm anxious, at any rate, to see Fede's father,' Hubert went on, gazing upward. He had lived so frankly in the bosom of his family that he had none of the *mauvaise honte* so many young men feel in discussing their future wife before their relations. 'So much depends upon one's father and mother!'

'Everything,' Sir Emilius assented, promptly. There, he was entirely at one with his nephew.

'The Marchese must be a splendid and high-minded man,' Hubert continued, shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed at the mountains. 'I only wish I could ever have seen my own father. One would like to know what noble characteristics, what intellectual traits one has a chance of inheriting; for to a physiologist, of course, heredity's everything.'

Sir Emilius was just about to cut short this awkward colloquy by observing diplomatically, 'Colonel Egremont was one of the finest built-soldiers in the British army,' when his sister anticipated him by answering in his place, 'Your father was a man to be proud of, Hubert.'

Sir Emilius raised his eyebrows, and glanced hard at his sister. He did not exclaim, 'Eh? what!' He merely whistled a tune unobtrusively. But he uttered not a word. He would not interfere in so delicate a matter. Still, it was all very well to say in the abstract, 'Honour thy father and thy mother;'

but how any one who had ever known Walter Egremont could, for a moment, describe him as 'a man to be proud of,' passed Sir Emilius's comprehension. However, it was Julia's business, not his; and as long as she chose to keep Hubert in ignorance of his father's real history, Sir Emilius did not feel quixotically inclined to enlighten him. Nevertheless, he rose, and, still whistling to himself, moved away some twenty yards, picking a late autumn flower or two ostentatiously as he went, lest it should embarrass Julia to know he was mentally criticising her veracity.

Mother and son were left alone. There was a moment's pause. Then Mrs Egremont began again. 'Though I sometimes fancy, Hubert,' she said, in a grave voice, 'you make too much of heredity.'

'You *can't* make too much of it,' Hubert answered, with decision. 'In mankind, it's omnipotent. My studies at my hospital, and afterwards my psychological observations at the asylum, have shown me, on the contrary, that not even men of science themselves have yet appreciated the whole wonder, the full marvel and mystery of heredity. Look at this case, for example—one only out of hundreds. I had a man on my list who had always kept a diary from the time he was twenty. He was a medical man, and he noted everything with medical accuracy. At four-and-twenty and two weeks, he lost his first tooth—the second left molar in the upper jaw. He had two twin sons. At four-and-twenty and three weeks, one of the twins lost his first tooth in turn. I asked which tooth, and found it was the second left

molar in the upper jaw. The other twin's teeth were apparently sound; but, a fortnight later, he had a violent toothache. I inquired in what tooth—exactly as I expected—the second left molar! That's the kind of result that has met me every day in the course of my researches. We seem like clocks, set each to run our appointed course in so many years and days and minutes. I know it so well now, that I almost feel at times as if I had no individuality at all of my own; I recognise myself as nothing more in the end than the sum of my joint parental tendencies.'

'It seems a dangerous doctrine,' Mrs Egremont murmured, with the feminine habit of seeing everything in an ethical light. 'It may lead to fatalism, and strike at the root of all moral endeavour.'

'If it is the truth, it is not dangerous,' Hubert answered, with firmer faith. 'The truth, dearest, is never dangerous. Truth never fears truth. Only a lie is liable to lead us into error.'

Mrs Egremont winced. 'Perhaps so,' she answered, with a pang of doubt. 'But are we all of us strong enough for the truth, my boy? I sometimes feel as if—as if it might crush and kill us.'

Hubert gazed at her tenderly. 'Dear mother,' he said, with an affectionate smile, '*you* of all women to urge such a fallacy! Why, you *couldn't* tell anything but the truth if you tried! You *must* be true! The truth is native to you.'

His mother winced again. 'Well, I hope you will be satisfied with Fede's father,' she said, very slowly, to change the subject.

'I hope Fede's father will be satisfied with *me*; that's more to the point,' her son answered, gaily, bending his arm, and feeling the biceps. 'I shall do my best to please him. I shall make myself all things to all men to suit him. After all, the Egremonts are English gentlefolk; and you have one of the prettiest places in Devonshire. I don't see why he shouldn't be ready to accept me as a son-in-law. Though, to be sure, the Tornabuoni were great lords in Florence before we and our kind were ever dreamt of.'

Mrs Egremont rose again. 'We ought to be getting back to the inn,' she said, wearily. 'It has been hot to-day, and I feel rather tired. I don't know why, but I always feel tired on the Continent nowadays.'

'Not only tired, but frightened, I fancy,' Hubert went on, without attaching much importance to his words. 'It seems to me you're half afraid of foreigners. Uncle Mill despises them: you seem to fear them. Come along, Uncle Mill; we're going back to the Black Eagle.'

Mrs Egremont's look was certainly one of fright as Hubert said those words. It was clear he had stirred some deep chord within her. She walked back to the inn by her son's side in silence. When they reached the door, the Tornabuoni had just gone in to their rooms from the balcony. And the concierge, as directed, said nothing as to their arrival.

Sir Emilius and his sister strolled in to the hotel, leaving Hubert on the verandah. While they went

up in the lift, the doctor turned a searching glance on Mrs Egremont.

'Do you think, Julia,' he said, slowly, 'it's quite wise—never to tell him?'

Mrs Egremont flushed up, and evaded the question. 'I *have* told him—as much as it's well for him to know,' she answered. She paused for a second, then she began again. 'Truth,' she mused, 'is relative. He *knows* the truth—as far as I conceive it.'

'Very relative indeed,' Sir Emilius assented. 'So relative, that it seems to come out quite upside down in some relations, doesn't it?'

Mrs Egremont said nothing: for she knew when to be silent.

CHAPTER IV

AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN

It was still day. The delicate rose-coloured glow within rather than upon the ice of the Alps had not yet given place to the cold steel-blue of twilight. Hubert, weary from his climb, waited outside in the cool for a minute or two, calling for a glass of light beer to refresh him after his toil before going in to his room to get ready for dinner. Autumn was in the air, but the day was summer-like. As he sat at the table outside the verandah and drank his *läger*, the concierge came down and began talking to him quite humanly. Towards the end of the season, indeed, even a concierge often discovers unsuspected human traits that are really refreshing. He unbends from the long restraint of summer.

'Beautiful lights just now on the Himmelberg, sir,' he said, turning to Hubert. 'It's a glorious mountain. Such a rearing mass! Go where you will in the world, you'll find nothing lovelier.'

'You know the world, then?' Hubert interposed, smiling, and amused at his air of universal travel.

'I ought to know it,' the concierge retorted, speaking fluently in English, 'for I've lived in half the best hotels in Europe.'

‘For example?’ Hubert queried.

The concierge ran them over, ransacking the distant cells of his memory. ‘The Métropole in London,’ he said; ‘I was interpreter there; the Continental, the Grand, and the Chatham in Paris; the Italie in Rome; the Hotel de Bavière in Munich; the Bristol at Naples—half-a-dozen others.’

‘Why, you know the Continent well,’ Hubert observed, surprised to find the man so widely diffused.

‘Yes, and a little beyond it—Shepherd’s at Cairo, the Kirsch at Algiers, the Brunswick at Boston, Cook’s Hotel at Jerusalem. Yet, go where you will in the world—I say it still—you won’t find a finer view anywhere than the Himmelberg.’

‘But you’re not a Bernese Swiss,’ Hubert interposed, eyeing him. ‘I can see that instantly.’

‘Why not?’ the concierge asked, surprised in turn at his visitor’s confidence.

‘Oh, I can tell it at a glance by your build and features. You come from the Grisons, I’ll bet; you were brought up Roumansch-speaking.’

‘Quite right,’ the concierge answered, with a smile of amusement at the young Englishman’s penetration. ‘I come from the Grisons, as you say; I have the face and figure of the Rhaetian mountaineers. But how did you guess I was brought up Roumansch-speaking?’

‘If you were a true Bernese,’ Hubert answered, after a second’s reflection, ‘you would have a more distinctive German accent—the Thuringian accent—in speaking English. But you speak it admirably—

as most of your countrymen do ; and what foreign tinge you have—very little indeed—is not Thuringian at all, but belongs to the type of the Latin races.'

The concierge was flattered. He drew himself up at once. 'You are right,' he answered again. 'We of the Rhaetian Alps all know our descent, and all are proud of it. It is a thing to remember. We are the original Etruscans !'

'You are,' Hubert replied. 'And, if I may venture to say it, only in the Grisons would a man in your position be likely to know it.'

'That is true, too,' the concierge admitted. 'We are like your own Scotch. We are all of us educated. And we learn languages easily. You see, our native Roumansch stands nearest of any modern Latin dialect to the original Latin. Therefore we learn French, Italian, Spanish easily ; because the roots of all them are contained in purer forms in our own dialect. And we speak German, too, for the most part from childhood ; so that languages come naturally to us. Besides which,' and he drew himself up with a curious pride, 'we inherit the old Etruscan intelligence.'

He spoke in quite another tone, now he had begun to discuss a subject which interested him, from the servile accent, half cringing, half familiar, which was habitual to him in the exercise of his office as concierge. He had dropped the recollection of a distinction of class. He saw that his hearer was interested ; and he went off into that not unnatural eulogy of his native canton which every intelligent Graubünder always delivers to all willing listeners.

'Then you saw I was from the Grisons?' he said, inquiringly, at last.

'Yes,' Hubert answered. 'I was sure of it. I gathered it both from your bodily appearance and your liquid accent. You have the true Etruscan build and features, and the Etruscan lips. You remind me exactly of the figures one sees on the Etruscan sarcophagi—strong, short, and thickset.'

'That is so once more,' the concierge asserted, delighted. 'Have you ever seen the tombs of the Volumnii, near Assisi?'

'I visited them last year,' Hubert answered, growing interested.

'Well, do you remember the sculptured nobles all carved in white stone who lounged on the lids? There was one of them near the door, an old Etruscan chief, who might easily have been taken for a portrait of my father.'

'That would not be surprising,' Hubert replied. 'I know such cases elsewhere. A wooden statue belonging to the old Egyptian Empire, six thousand years ago, was dug up at Memphis, and it exactly resembled the Arab sheikh of the neighbouring modern Egyptian village. I have studied these questions of heredity for some years, and I find that when one can compare family portraits together for several generations, the most surprising likenesses often reveal themselves between kinsmen who are separated from one another by centuries.'

'That is so, I know,' the concierge answered, without any consciousness of obtruding into a scientific field where his observation was scanty.

'For in the Grisons to this day I find hundreds of faces which exactly reproduce the Etruscan statues, and the wall-paintings on the tombs I have been to see at Corneto and Volaterra.'

Where else in the world, Hubert thought to himself—except, perhaps, as the concierge said, in Scotland—would a man of the people have observed or remembered such a class of facts as this Rhaetian peasant?

Hubert was just going on to hazard a guess at the nationality of the various waiters and chambermaids—for he had a curious knack of jumping at correct conclusions on these matters—when their attention was suddenly diverted by the appearance of a stranger, who wound slowly down the dusty high road from the direction of the Gotthard.

He was a singular-looking figure, very tall and erect, of military bearing, with a knapsack on his back, and a hat stuck jauntily on one side of his head in an ostentatiously rakish fashion. From a little distance, he looked at first sight like an English gentleman; seen nearer, he still preserved some relics of gentility, almost obscured, however, by the shabbiness of his dress and the obvious marks of vulgar dissipation on his bloated features. Even his erectness itself turned out on closer view to be somewhat deceptive; the man held himself straight, it is true, with an almost exaggerated air of self-respect; yet his back was bent at the neck, and his knees were uncertain. The broad and cynical face had once most probably been handsome; now, drink and hard living had utterly degraded it. As he

strolled up to the table, with a roll in his gait, trying his best to assume an attitude of careless ease, Hubert saw at a glance he was indeed an English gentleman—most likely an officer—but in the very last stage of drunken downfall.

The stranger nodded, and flung his knapsack on the table by Hubert's side. 'Phew! Hot walking,' he said, mopping his mouth and forehead with a rather dirty handkerchief. He concealed his still dirtier cuffs by a little jerk under his sleeves with a dexterity which argued long use and practice. 'I've just tramped over the Col from Goeschenen.'

'It's a beautiful walk,' Hubert answered, coldly, finishing his beer and half rising.

'It's a damned hot walk,' the newcomer responded, with a quaint air of easy *bonhommie*. 'It may be beautiful: I'm not much judge of that, for I never noticed it; but I know it's confoundedly long and hilly. *And* the dust—oh, I'll trouble you! Haven't had such a pull for close on twenty years. As an officer and a gentleman, I'm unaccustomed to walking; I take carriage exercise.' He drew himself up, hid one shabby trouser behind the other leg, and turned to the concierge. 'Here you, young fellow,' he said, in an overbearing tone; 'got anything to drink, eh?'

The concierge surveyed him contemptuously from head to foot. The stranger's clothes were certainly much more than merely dusty; they were threadbare and dirty. 'You can call the waiter,' the concierge said, with slow distinctness, 'and give him your

order: whatever you like—coffee, lemonade, seltzer, soda-water.'

The officer and gentleman flung him back his contempt with interest. 'Lemonade! Seltzer! Soda-water!' he cried. 'Do I *look* like a teetotalter? I suppose you take me for one of Dr Lunn's psalm-singing Grindelwalders! No, sir. *Not* soda-water. I'm not taking any. Brandy, neat brandy, the best cognac you've got—and plenty of it!'

The concierge answered nothing. He just pressed a little hand-bell. 'Alphonse,' he said to the close-cropped waiter who answered it, 'take this—gentleman's order.'

The new-comer, quite undisconcerted at the tone, repeated his instructions in excellent French.

'Cognac, monsieur; *oui*, monsieur,' the waiter answered mechanically, with a glance at the trousers.

He turned on his heel. The stranger called out after him. 'And look here,' he added in English, 'while you're about it, young man, you may as well bring me some absinthe and some vermouth.'

'Instead of the cognac, monsieur?' the waiter asked, hesitating.

'*Instead* of the cognac!' the new-comer replied angrily. 'Who countermanded the cognac, I should like to know? No, jackanapes, no; *with* the cognac, with it—all three of them together! Why don't you go and get them when you're told, you fool, instead of standing there and grinning like a laughing jack-ass?'

The waiter drew back, surprised at the unwonted vigour of his customer's language. '*Oui*, monsieur!'

Merci, monsieur! he answered, taken aback, but official as ever.

The boisterous stranger turned with an inane and placid smile to Hubert. 'The image doesn't know his work,' he observed, with military swagger. 'Never heard of absinthe and brandy before, apparently. Makes a splendid drink. Has a singular effect on the epigastrium, that mixture. Warms a man when he's cold; cools him when he's hot: seems to act sympathetically on the peripheral nerve-terminals.'

Hubert caught at the word. 'Peripheral nerve-terminals?' he said. 'Epigastrium! Why, you speak like a physiologist!'

The stranger vaulted on to the table with a bound. He was not without a strange sort of clumsy agility. He sat there, smiling. 'Well, I'm a military man by trade,' he said, after a pause; 'in point of fact, a colonel. But I'm a little bit of most things in an amateur way—from a hoary old reprobate to a man of science. Especially in the direction of the hoary old reprobate. I pride myself on that. I can give points, as a reprobate, to any man of my age and weight in the service—and beat him easily.'

'So I should think,' Hubert said, with a curl of the lips, half rising to go, yet restrained by the curious interest of the man's degraded personality. 'You look the character.'

'Ha, you're a good one for judging at first sight,' the Colonel answered, unoffended by Hubert's perfect frankness. 'You put your finger on the place. That touches the spot, sir; that touches the spot, as they say in the advertisement. This is not mere make-up.

It runs in the blood with all my family to be hoary old reprobates.' He bit his thumb. 'We've been hoary old reprobates, now, for five generations.'

'You bear the obvious traces of it,' Hubert answered, with quiet confidence. For the stranger's face was both red and swollen.

'That's so,' the Colonel continued, slapping one flabby thigh with his open hand; 'you're a man of penetration, sir. You know what's what when you see it. We're citizens of Bohemia, root and stock, my family. We go to the dogs with accelerated speed in each new century.'

As he spoke, the waiter returned with the brandy and absinthe. 'Shall I pour them out, monsieur?' he asked, holding up a liqueur glass.

The Colonel drew out a single eyeglass, fixed it solemnly in its place, and regarded him through it for some minutes with the attentive air with which one regards some curious but noxious insect. '*Je vous remercie*,' he said at last, with quaint mock politeness; '*je verse moi-même, imbécile!*' He glanced at Hubert. 'A *petit verre* for me!' he cried. 'What rot! *This* is how *I* take it!' He seized the small glass of cognac and emptied it into a tumbler. Then he poured out about three times as much more from the decanter on top of it. After that, he lifted the vermouth bottle and the absinthe and poured a wine-glassful or so of each on top of the brandy. He looked at it all admiringly against the dying light in the western sky. '*That's* the sort of thing,' he said at last, 'to put the blood in circulation.'

'But you can't *like* it so,' Hubert cried. 'Such a nasty mixture.'

'I beg your pardon,' the Colonel replied, tossing it off at a gulp. 'I don't like it. I love it. I'm a modest man in most ways, and I admit I have my faults; but on the question of my own likes and dislikes, I submit, I can claim to be the first living authority in Europe.'

He turned the glass upside down, and laid it empty on the marble table. 'That's wonderful,' Hubert said, 'wonderful! How long do you reckon to live at that rate, may I venture to ask you?'

The Colonel's good-humour was absolutely imperturbable. 'Well, my grandfather died of it at eighty,' he answered, in a most cheerful voice, 'and my father at seventy. I reckon myself to last, with luck, till sixty or thereabouts. Though, having been deucedly ill-treated by an unnatural wife, I may go even sooner. It's an interesting example of what Darwin calls the law of accelerated inheritance.' And he poured himself out another small glass of brandy.

The curious gleams of science interested Hubert. 'You are never drunk, I suppose?' he remarked, drawing back with some natural disgust, yet regarding him as a valuable object of study, like a germ under the microscope.

'Not often, you bet,' the Colonel answered, with candour. He spoke with deep regret. 'It don't often run to it,' he murmured, quite sadly. 'You see, it costs a good deal to make me drunk nowadays; and, times being hard and women cruel, I seldom have cash in hand to spend upon a manful and resolute

attempt in that direction—except about quarter-days, when my wife pays up my miserable pittance. Though now and then a friend is kind enough to defray the expense of the experiment; but it's long—and costly.'

'And deadly,' Hubert added.

The Colonel acquiesced. 'It's killing me,' he admitted, 'of course; but, as I often say, we must all of us die; and how can man die better than when he dies enjoying himself?'

'Alcoholic narcosis, I suppose?' Hubert murmured, looking hard at him with suppressed disgust.

'The very word,' the Colonel cried, holding out one hand with evident pride to show how it trembled. 'Alcoholic narcosis. You hit it first time. Which will you take, a cigar or a cocoa-nut?'

His vulgar leer was hateful to Hubert; yet the scientific interest of the case retained him. 'Well, you're frank about it, any way,' he observed, half angry with himself for continuing to talk with so abject a creature.

The Colonel drew himself up. There were remnants of a gentleman and a handsome man about him. 'A soldier,' he said, with a sort of malicious mock-dignity, 'should always be frank. And I flatter myself I've served the country with distinction. I never quail under fire. Drink's my worst enemy—and I face it daily.' He poured himself out a little more neat brandy.

The concierge motioned quietly to the waiter to remove the bottle. But the Colonel was too quick for him. He caught at it with a rapid clutch and

clasped it to his bosom. 'No, no, my friend,' he said, smiling. 'We are always told to love our enemies. Would you make me a heathen?' And he clung to it affectionately.

'You know you're killing yourself?' Hubert put in.

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. His manners, Hubert had noticed from the first, were much Italianate, as of a man who had spent many years in Italy. 'Of course,' he said, 'I'm killing myself. 'Tis a soldier's business. I lead a forlorn hope against the enemy's guns ten times a day.' He made a lunge with an imaginary sword at the brandy bottle. 'What does that matter?' he went on. 'We're all of us dying—all under sentence of death—you, and I, and the rest of us—and what difference does a year or two more or less make to us? I tell you what, my dear sir, it was a fine philosopher who first said those words, "A short life and a merry one." He summed up in one phrase the wisdom of centuries.'

Hubert looked at him with a mixture of curiosity and disgust. The stranger sat on the table still, and gazed across at them with a hateful smile of complacent degradation. His face was puffy. The eyes were red and bleared; the lips had the dark blue hue of the habitual sot's. Hubert knew the type well; he had studied it carefully for two years at his hospital. As they sat and faced one another, Rosa came down the steps with a message for a second. 'Madame has left her bag, monsieur,' she said in French to Hubert, picking it up and taking it off. 'She sent me to get it.' For Hubert had carried her little reticule home for her.

The Colonel, as he called himself, turned to the girl with that offensive and senile leer which no man can endure to see on the face of another. 'By Jove, that's a good-looking young woman!' he observed in English to Hubert. Then he added, in tolerable German, 'What is your name, my dear?' ogling her.

Rosa measured him with her eye from head to foot, severely. 'My name's the chambermaid,' she answered, with a toss of her pretty head. 'Ring once for waiter; twice for boots; three times for chambermaid. And when I know your number—I'll take care some other chambermaid answers it.'

The 'hoary old reprobate' stared after her, astonished, as she tripped up the steps with an air of determination. 'God bless my soul,' he cried, 'what a smart young woman!' He jumped from the table and stood on tip-toe gazing after her.

The episode, however, seemed to recall to him the fact that he was in search of a lodging. 'I want a room here to-night, by the way,' he said, turning at last to the concierge.

'I'm sorry, sir,' the concierge answered, in his most official tone, 'but—we're full up this evening.'

The Colonel drew back and surveyed him admiringly. 'Young fellow,' he said—though the concierge was forty—'you're a first-class liar! That's very well tried—very well tried indeed—for a beginner. If you go on like that, you ought to end by becoming a most accomplished diplomatist. Be ambassador to Russia. Do you expect me to believe that every bed in this house is full in the beginning

of October? If so, I can only say you've mistaken my character.'

He strode up the steps and entered the hotel, humming. Hubert did not follow him. The concierge did—having his doubts as to the coats and umbrellas in the vestibule. When he reached the top flight, the Colonel turned to him. 'No nonsense, my friend,' he said, in a severer tone than he had hitherto adopted. 'I want a room in this hotel to-night, and I mean to have it. You have plenty vacant; and if luggage is in the way,' he glanced at his knapsack and slapped his pocket, 'I'll pay beforehand for bed and breakfast.'

The concierge hesitated. 'I don't know—' he began.

His interlocutor stopped him with an angry gesture. 'Send me the proprietor,' he said, assuming the air of a great gentleman. 'I propose to honour his hotel with my patronage.'

The concierge gave way. 'We might put you in seventy-two,' he said, pretending to consult his books, and looking suspiciously at the hoary old reprobate. 'What name shall I enter?'

'What's that to you?' the Colonel answered, growing redder than before. 'I pay in advance, I tell you. He pulled out a worn purse with a hole in its side, and counted a few francs into the concierge's hand with the mien of a millionaire. 'A gentleman is a gentleman, in spite of misfortunes,' he observed, sententiously, 'and will not submit to be sat upon by a lackey.' He paused a moment, and reflected. Then he dropped his voice a little. 'Anybody of the

name of Egremont in the hotel?' he asked, in a confidential tone.

'Mrs Egremont and her son,' the concierge replied, a trifle astonished. 'They came a week ago. That was young Mr Egremont you were speaking to just now—the gentleman by the table.'

The Colonel drew himself up and looked across at Hubert, who was still sitting on a chair beside the verandah. He observed him with interest. 'Well, he's a fine, well-grown young man,' he remarked, after a pause, surveying him deliberately. 'A young man any father in England might be proud of! A chip of the old block, as far as body goes! But I'm afraid, after all, he's a canting humbug. I hate hypocrisy! Drank beer, though, like a man! Hope his mother hasn't succeeded in making a confounded Methodist of him!'

'Seventy-two is six francs,' the concierge said, returning strictly to business; 'and plain breakfast three. I suppose you will go into *table d'hôte* this evening. *Table d'hôte* is five. Fourteen in all, sir.'

The Colonel eyed him severely. 'There, young man,' he replied, 'you make your blooming little error! I will *not* go in to *table d'hôte* this evening. I will dine *à la carte*, unostentatiously and simply, in number seventy-two. I am travelling incognito.' He drew himself up again. 'Mind,' he said, lowering his voice, 'don't mention to Mr Egremont that I asked at all after him or his family. You are not paid by your master, young fellow, to carry tales about from one guest to another.'

The concierge nodded, and sent the boots to accompany the threadbare stranger to the room assigned him. The Colonel strode on with much military dignity. The concierge returned to the verandah to Hubert.

'Who is he?' the young man asked, with a certain languid curiosity.

'I'm sure I can't say, sir,' the concierge answered; 'but he can't be anybody much, for he didn't write for rooms beforehand. Though, to be sure, we have gentlemen come here in the climbing season who look more like chimney-sweeps than like people of position, through accidents on the mountains. But *this* isn't one of those; his clothes are old and patched—premeditated poverty!'

'He's a loathsome sight,' Hubert mused; 'and yet, there are relics of a gentleman about him still.'

'It takes an opera-glass to see them, though,' the concierge added. 'I should say by the look of him he lives on brandy.'

'He'll die of it soon,' Hubert answered. 'His is a very bad case. He hasn't much more than six months of life, at most, left in him.'

'You think not?'

'I don't think, I know. He has had delirium tremens, I can see, for years; and he's well on his way now to alcoholic insanity and creeping paralysis.'

'That's bad,' the concierge said.

'Yes, inherited,' Hubert went on. 'He has brought it on himself in large part, of course; but his

ancestors had laid the seeds of it before him. His children will develop it sooner than he; and his grandchildren will be born idiots or epileptics.'

'You're a doctor, sir?' the concierge asked, eyeing him hard.

'Not exactly a doctor; but next door to it—a physiologist. I've spent three years in watching and studying these cases at an hospital. I know the type well. You take my word for it—if that man has a son, the son is doomed to insanity before thirty!'

CHAPTER V

LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY

THE *table d'hôte* that evening consisted of five people only—for the 'hoary old reprobate' persisted in his intention of dining alone in number seventy-two off a *menu* of his ordering.

The Marchese and Fede were the first to enter the *salle à manger*. They had only been seated a minute, however, when Hubert dropped in, not expecting to see them. He gave a start of surprise when his eyes lighted upon Fede.

'Why, signorina,' he cried, advancing to her with outstretched hand, 'I didn't know you were here. We were not expecting you till to-morrow morning.'

Fede took his hand timidly. Her eyes met his and dropped. 'Oh, Hubert,' she said—'I—I mean, Mr Egremont, how well you're looking! Papa, allow me to introduce Mr Egremont.'

'This is an unexpected pleasure,' Hubert cried—not searching about for a phrase like a modern novelist, but using the easy and convenient formula. 'I'm delighted to meet you! When did you arrive? I'm afraid, Fede, your father doesn't understand English; and my Italian, you know—'

The Marchese bowed impressively with Florentine politeness. He was carefully groomed, and his big black moustache looked extremely imposing. 'English,' he answered, smiling, and showing two rows of pearly white teeth. 'As well as you do, Mr Egremont! We Florentines are nothing, you know, if not cosmopolitan. Besides, my mother was an Englishwoman, and so was my wife; and when I was a clerk in a merchant's office in Fenchurch Street—'

Hubert's preconceived notions of the proud Tuscan nobleman received a severe blow. 'A merchant's office in Fenchurch Street?' he repeated, bewildered. What had a Florentine Tornabuoni to do with Fenchurch Street?'

The Marchese stroked the ends of the big black moustache with evident amusement. He was overflowing with good humour. 'Yes, a merchant's office in Fenchurch Street,' he reiterated, delighted. 'You see, we Florentines are also nothing if not commercial; and as my ancestors, the Tornabuoni, had left us a Property'—the Marchese always dropped his voice reverently at that sacred word, and pronounced it somehow with a capital initial—'a wine-growing estate in the valley of the Arno, which does a big export business in Chianti with England—my father thought it best for me, while I was young and plastic, to learn the ways of the English wine-market on the spot in London.'

'I see,' Hubert murmured, sitting down and feeling very much taken aback. This was *not* the haughty Florentine his fancy had pictured. The

man before him was gentleman to the core, but he was distinctly commercial.

'You know my Chianti, I dare say,' the Marchese continued, with his expansive smile. 'The Monte Riggioni brand. It's making its way, I'm told, at Romano's and Gatti's.'

'I—I don't think I discriminate between vintages of Chianti,' Hubert answered, much surprised. But he noted mentally that the Italian aristocrat was not above turning an honest penny.

'When did you get here?' he went on, turning round to Fede. 'How unkind you must have thought it of me not to have been waiting at the hotel to meet you! But your father wrote you wouldn't arrive till to-morrow.'

'I didn't wish to give you the trouble,' the Marchese answered, taking the words from Fede. 'It was a lovely day, so I decided, on second thoughts, we had better push on to Rothenthal at once, instead of waiting over night at the inn at Goeschenen.'

'We are the gainers,' Hubert answered, still awkward and confused. 'But I could have wished I had known it, Fede; my mother and I would have been on the road to meet you.'

The Marchese noticed that he called her plain Fede. These English have certainly the most precipitate ways of plunging into matrimony! But, being a shrewd and observant father, he had taken a preliminary survey of the young man whom Fede had picked up in an Oxford college, and he was pleased at first sight with his visible qualities. There

was an air of solid coininess about his simple dinner-jacket, and his studs and sleeve-links were of a sterling kind that inspired confidence.

One minute later, Mrs Egremont and Sir Emilius entered the room together.

Hubert rose to introduce them. 'Mother,' he said, bringing her forward with natural pride, 'I find to my surprise the Marchese and—er—and Signorina Tornabuoni have arrived unexpectedly. Allow me to introduce you; the Marchese Tornabuoni, the Marchesa Fede; my mother, Mrs Egremont.'

The Italian bowed low with Florentine *empressement*. 'Charmed,' he muttered between his white teeth, 'charmed to make your acquaintance.'

'And my uncle, Sir Emilius Rawson,' Hubert added, glancing round at him.

A curious shade of expression flitted for a second across the Marchese's face, which did not escape Hubert's keen notice. His future father-in-law was *not* an Englishman; yet it was clear he was quite as visibly impressed by Sir Emilius's title as the veriest of snobs in our most snobbish of islands. 'And Sir Emilius,' he went on, bowing again, 'delighted to meet you. We had heard you were staying here—the concierge told us—but we did not connect you, somehow, with Mrs Egremont's party. Fede, my dear, you omitted to tell me that Sir Emilius Rawson was Mr Hubert's uncle.' As he said it, he was reflecting inwardly that an English Sir, even if only a knight, was usually wealthy. Beer gains no coronet till it has sold its million bottles.

'I didn't know it,' Fede answered, with an apologetic smile. 'Hubert—er—never happened to mention it to me.'

'We had—so many other things to talk about,' Hubert ventured, with a smile, in the vain attempt to keep his eye simultaneously on his uncle, his mother, the Marchese, and Fede.

Sir Emilius came to the rescue. He had diagnosed his man at a single glance—sound common sense, a head for affairs, hot-tempered, placable, overworks his digestion. 'I was only plain Dr Rawson when the signorina was in England,' he put in. 'A royal duke had luckily, soon after, a bad attack of gout—and—you behold me a baronet!'

'A baronet!' the Marchese echoed. That was good, a baronet! He recollected to have heard that, while knighthoods are sometimes cheap, unless a man has money enough to support the hereditary dignity he can never attain to the honour of a baronetcy.

Soup intervened—the inevitable Julienne. The Marchese addressed himself to it with Italian promptitude. 'I understand,' he answered. 'Physician in ordinary—that kind of thing, isn't it? A very good profession. The one unmistakably beneficent calling—for I don't count priests—and also paying. We are partners in business, Sir Emilius. *I* deal in Chianti, *you* deal in gout; between us we ought to catch most of the world in our net, I fancy.'

Sir Emilius smiled. 'And we do,' he answered.

Throughout the rest of dinner it gradually dawned

on Hubert's mind that the haughty Italian aristocrat was gently engaged in exploring the question, not whether his prospective son-in-law was the equal in birth, rank, breeding, and position of the Marchesa Fede, but whether his fortune was one worth a sensible man's acceptance for his marriageable daughter. Once by mere chance, indeed, Mrs Egremont happened to allude in passing to her place in Devonshire. The Marchese was down upon her at once. 'Ah, you live in Devonshire,' he said, wrestling with the *table d'hôte* chicken. 'I have heard it is most beautiful. You have a house—a country house there. Delightful, de-lightful! Your English country seats, they are always so charming!'

'Our views are exquisite,' Hubert put in. 'We look down upon a sweet little Devonshire river.'

'Yes, no doubt,' the Marchese said, helping himself to Yvorne. In England you have always such magnificent timber. A park, I suppose?' and he looked at Mrs Egremont with insinuating inquiry.

'Yes, a charming old park,' Mrs Egremont answered quietly, 'in a beautiful village.'

'Deer?' the Marchese inquired. He cared nothing for Nature, but he knew very well that deer in England were a symbol of extreme wealth and county position.

'A few fallow deer,' Mrs Egremont answered, wondering why he asked the question. 'They look sweet under the shade of the spreading oaks in Devon.'

The Marchese scored one good point in favour of

the family. People with fallow deer are people of consideration.

'And *your* estates, Sir Emilius,' the Italian went on, with a bland smile of suggestion; 'are they also in Devonshire?'

The doctor smiled in return. 'My estates,' he replied, 'are entirely in Harley Street.'

'Ah, I see,' the Marchese echoed, at fault for once in an English allusion. 'Town Property. Most lucrative!'

Sir Emilius found himself ignominiously compelled to elucidate his little joke. 'Harley Street,' he explained drily, 'is the doctors' quarter in London. It is wholly given over to medical men, you know—a paradise of pill-makers. I own no houses there—not even my own—which is merely leasehold. But you seemed so absolutely at home in England, Marchese, that I thought you would appreciate my—er—my delicate and playful way of putting it.'

The Marchese nodded assent. 'How stupid of me,' he exclaimed. 'I understand, of course; I catch your idea. You mean to say, your estate is the profits of your profession.'

'Quite so,' Sir Emilius answered, with an eye on the salad.

The Marchese did not attempt to conceal the scope of his inquiries. 'Then the park in Devonshire came to you through your husband, madame?' he suggested tentatively.

'No,' Mrs Egremont answered, hardly perceiving his drift. 'Nothing came to me through my hus-

band. It was my dear father's place, and I inherited it from him. It will be Hubert's after me.' She spoke with the unobtrusive and pleasing confidence of an English lady.

'That's odd,' the Marchese continued, applying the common pump with less skill than vigour. 'It did not go to Sir Emilius. I thought that in England property descended always to the eldest son. You have the law of primogeniture.'

'I am only Mrs Egremont's half-brother,' Sir Emilius interposed, clearer sighted than his sister. 'Our mother was twice married. The first time to my father, a doctor at Norwich, a mere professional man, who left me unfortunately nothing to speak of, but what brains I may possess; the second time to a well-to-do Devonshire squire, who bequeathed to my sister his estate and fortune. Which is why *I* am a poor devil of a doctor in Harley Street, while *she* rolls in her carriage down the slopes of Dartmoor.'

'I see,' the Marchese answered; 'a double household. Yet'—he took Sir Emilius's social measure with a frank glance of observation—'I should say you made a very fair interest on the brains which you tell me were all the inheritance your father left you.'

'My brother is one of the most distinguished medical men in London,' Mrs Egremont put in, with sisterly pride.

'And my sister is one of the most confiding women in England,' Sir Emilius added, in the same half undertone.

The Marchese was well satisfied. The pump had acted. These were the very points he wanted to know. To-morrow, of course, he would have a formal talk with Hubert and his uncle, to settle the details of this business arrangement, this partnership into which Fede was thinking of entering. He would learn in full precisely how much the young man was worth, and how much he proposed to settle on Fede. A house? An income? An estate? A remainder? Meanwhile, however, he was so far satisfied with his preliminary inquiries that he waived further question. He could gather that the Egremonts were 'the right sort of people'—people with whom a man of Property (with a capital initial) might safely conclude an alliance on his daughter's behalf, provided all other things turned out favourable. So the Marchese was affable. Affability was his forte. He diverged upon Florence. And when the Marchese was once well launched upon Florentine gossip, he was always interesting.

As for Fede, she sat and smiled with a smile that alone was better than talking. She did not say much, but the little she said pleased her future mother-in-law. As they went out of the *salle à manger*, Hubert gave a significant glance at his mother. Mrs Egremont bent towards him; her lips moved slightly. 'She is charming, dear, charming,' the mother said, in a low sweet voice. And they passed on to the verandah.

'It's a lovely evening,' Hubert observed. 'Let us take a stroll through the grounds.' And he glanced

up at the moon, now seen through the waving tops of the larches.

The Marchese hesitated. If he had known nothing at all of Hubert's position and prospects, he would have met the suggestion with a prompt negative. But *as* Mrs Egremont was a squiress in Devonshire, and *as* Hubert was her only son and heir to the Property, the Marchese decided, after a moment's pause, that there could be no great harm in letting the young people stroll out by themselves for a few minutes together—if he and Mrs Egremont followed in the wake and kept a good look-out upon them.

'May I, papa?' Fede asked, looking up at him.

'Shall we, madame?' the Marchese asked Mrs Egremont in turn, with more Italian correctness.

'The young people would probably prefer to go out alone,' Sir Emilius suggested. He had once been young himself, and had not quite forgotten it.

To Luigi Tornabuoni, however, the suggestion was revolutionary. A young girl stroll out in the grounds of an hotel for ten minutes alone with her prospective lover! Impossible! impossible! But he understood these English, and dissembled his feelings. 'It's a lovely night,' he said. 'I should enjoy a stroll myself. Fede, my love, run upstairs and fetch a light wrap—Mrs Egremont, can she bring down a shawl or cape for you? You will help me to chaperon them?'

'Oh, would you ask my maid, in number twenty, for my Cashmere shawl, dear?' Mrs Egremont said, with a motherly smile at Fede.

The Marchese noted two things; first, that she

smiled ; and second, that she brought a maid abroad with her when she travelled. 'Looks coiny,' he thought to himself ; 'coiny ! I shouldn't be surprised if Fede, after all, without in the least knowing it, has managed to patch up a very good match for herself. But, mother of heaven, how foolishly they do arrange these things in England !'

They strolled out into the grounds. It was one of those serene October evenings, rare further north, when the odour of pine and the buzz of insects seem to echo summer. The larches swayed and trembled in the moonlight. The three seniors walked behind ; Fede and Hubert walked on in front, just far enough away to say those little nothings which were nearest to their hearts at that moment of meeting. The paths wound irregularly among shrubs and trees, and it was not even impossible—behind a clump of rhododendrons—but this book may perhaps be read in families.

Hubert fixed a white rose in Fede's bosom as she walked. She looked down at it, blushing. 'You look sweeter than ever, Fede,' he said, gazing hard at her.

'Do I, darling ? If I do, for your sake, I'm glad of it.'

'And that dress becomes you so ! Oh, Fede, what a delight ! I've been so dreaming of you, and longing for you. And you ?'

'Well, what do you *think*, Hubert ?'

'I *think*—you've missed me.'

'Clever boy ! Who told you ?'

'The usual little bird, I fancy, Fede.'

Fede clasped her hands in the passionate Italian fashion. A British matron would have called it theatrical; but to Hubert, who knew how naturally she did it, it was charming. 'Ah, darling, that same little bird came and perched on the vine by my bedroom window,' she said, with a deep tremor; 'and what do you think it sang to me all day long? "Tweet, tweet, tweet; Hu-bert, Hu-bert, Hu-bert, Hubert! You love him; he loves you—Hubert, Hubert."'

She said it with a delicious imitation of the song of the beccafico. Her tongue trilled like a bird's; her breast rose and fell sweetly. It was a simple trick, but it made his heart beat hard within him.

'And *how much* have you missed me?' Hubert asked once more, breaking forth with one of those eternal nothings of love which lovers of all ages have asked and answered in a thousand languages.

Fede stretched her two arms as wide as they would go. 'As much as *that!*' she answered, laughing, 'As much as the world! As much as all the way from Florence to England!'

He leaned forward pleadingly. 'Just one, Fede; just one!' They were abreast of the rhododendrons.

Fede glanced round her with a nervous look. Papa was too near. 'Not here, dear; not here,' she said, in a faint voice of dissent. But her eyes belied her.

Hubert snatched it, and walked on. His hand was on her arm. 'And my mother, darling?' he asked, more with pride than anxiety.

'Oh, Hubert, there can only be one opinion about your mother.'

'So I think,' he answered. 'But I wanted you to love her.'

'I shall, I'm sure. She so soft, so gentle. And she looks so young, too. Yet very sympathetic. I'm sure I shall feel to her more like a sister than a daughter.'

'Her heart is young,' Hubert answered truthfully.

'And her face, and her figure! But not too young. She has also the look of a woman who has suffered.'

'She lost my father young,' Hubert replied. 'But she loves me so much, she is happy now, I think. And it makes her happy to secure my happiness. All has turned out so well! Do you know, Fede, the first sight of your father's face completely reassured me.'

'Reassured you, darling? Why did you need reassuring?'

'Well, I thought he might demand so much in the way of noble birth and all that sort of thing. But now I see him, I feel my fears were wholly groundless—or at least exaggerated. I fancied a Tornabuoni with a six hundred year old name would think so little of us. Yet—if you don't mind my saying so—I couldn't help noticing he was visibly impressed, when Uncle Emilius came in, by a brand new baronetcy.'

Fede glanced at her lover proudly. 'If he wasn't satisfied with *you*, dear,' she said, 'he *must* be exacting! And besides, we Florentines think so much of England. It's fashionable in Florence to be half-English, you know. *All* the best families intermarry with Englishmen.'

'I'm glad of that,' Hubert answered, as they passed a second clump of taller trees, 'for it tells on my side. . . . Now—quick, Fede darling—another.'

There was an interval of twenty seconds for refreshments.

'Besides,' Fede went on next minute, glancing back along the path, and trying hard to look as if nothing had happened, '—what were we talking about—let me see! Oh, yes; the baronetcy! Well—you mustn't mind my saying it, dear—it's Florentine, you know, to be strictly business-like; and papa knows quite enough of England to know that a baronetcy means money. So I was glad to hear you had a title laid on in the family to impress him.'

'But *I* haven't money, Fede. You must understand that. It's all my mother's.'

'I know, darling, I know; and to me, that's nothing. I would marry you, Hubert, if we had to earn our bread and to live in a hovel. But papa's not *in love* with you, of course; and that makes all the difference! He's a man of business, papa; and he'll want to know soon all about your position and prospects and so forth. *I* had never thought about those; so I was ever so glad to hear a number of things that your mother and uncle said at dinner; because I knew it would satisfy him—and—and—and—'

'And bring our marriage nearer.'

Fede clasped his arm ecstatically. 'Marriage!' she cried. 'Oh, Hubert, I don't mind about *that*. I only want to be near you! *This* is joy enough for me! *This* is life with the halo on it!'

CHAPTER VI

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

'YOU were wrong in what you said this afternoon, Uncle Emilius,' Hubert began that evening, as soon as the Tornabuoni had left the *salon*. 'You were wrong when you said, "You fall in love with the girls you see; how the dickens can you fall in love with the girls you don't see?" The mystery of love goes much deeper than that. There is another and a far profounder side to it.'

'So young men always think when they're in love themselves,' Sir Emilius replied, with middle-aged tolerance for the follies of youth. 'They see everything through the rose-coloured glasses of their fancy. But they see through those glasses in another sense when they're twenty years older.'

Hubert paused for a second, reflectively. They were sitting with Mrs Egremont in her private room. 'Mother,' he said, turning to her, 'you must help me. Uncle Emilius is altogether too resolutely scientific. And yet not philosophically scientific either; for falling in love, after all, is a great fact and factor in the history of humanity; and, like every other powerful component of our nature, it must be there for something.'

'It is there,' Uncle Emilius replied, 'for the very

simple purpose of making men and women, at the turning point of life, enter into what is after all a very irrational union with one another, viewed from the standpoint of their personal convenience. To be the father of a family—as I know by experience—is no easy sinecure; to be the mother of a family is still less of an amusement, Julia, when one comes to face its meaning fairly. If we acted as was wisest for our own convenience alone, we would shirk the duty of raising up future generations of men. But there, nature intervenes with the illusion of love; she cajoles us into believing, for a moment, that this, that, or the other particular woman is absolutely indispensable to our happiness or our very existence. As soon as we have made the step irrevocable, and committed ourselves to this husband or that wife, as the case may be, for the whole of a lifetime, we find out our mistake, and discover that any other person of modern attractiveness and tolerable manners would probably have done about equally well for us.'

Hubert played with his cigarette-holder for a moment before he replied. Then he answered quietly, 'I still maintain your view is neither scientific nor philosophical. You omit to take into consideration the very essence of love—its fastidious selectiveness.'

'Explain!' Sir Emilius exclaimed. 'Explain!' And he leaned back in his chair, regarding his nephew with supremely critical superiority. The two men were singularly unlike in intellect—Sir Emilius keen and acute, not broad; Hubert expansive, many-sided, elusive.

The young man looked at the ceiling, and half shut his eyes, dreamily. 'One day this summer term at Oxford,' he said, at last, taking up his parable, 'I was lying on a bank in Bagley Wood, when foxgloves flared, and bullfinches had put on their finest coats for courting. As I lay and looked about me, I saw, on a bent of grass close by, an orange-tip butterfly, just escaped from the chrysalis. He stood there, motionless, just poised on the stem up which he had crawled; and after a while, as he grew accustomed to his strange new body, he began timidly to plim his untried wings, half opening them in the sunlight from time to time, as if wondering how they got there. For remember, mother, he was bred nothing better than a common green caterpillar. He knew nought of wings, of flight, of honey; nought of love, of his mate, of his destiny. So he sat there, spreading out his airy vans with vague wonder, and mentally comparing his six slender legs with the creeping suckers on which he crawled in his nonage.'

Sir Emilius sniffed. 'Poetry!' he murmured. 'Pure unmitigated poetry! Nothing on earth to do with science.'

'Let him go on, Mill,' Mrs Egremont put in, with a warning look. 'I want to hear what Hubert has to say about it.'

'Science has its philosophy which is deeper than its facts,' Hubert continued, pressing his mother's hand in mute gratitude. 'And the use of the facts is, to teach us the philosophy. Well, I saw my butterfly at last creep up his bent of grass—he that was till

lately a small green grub, gorging himself on cresses; and one minute later, he had spread his wings, and ventured into the unknown, a full-fledged orange-tip. He seemed conscious of his beauty, too, as he spread his white pinions, with their brilliant orange badge, and their delicate fringe of Tyrian purple. All at once, as he fluttered and hesitated in mid air, he caught sight from afar of a virgin brimstone. "Will he chase her?" I thought, though I knew he would not; but he gazed at her, disdainful, and flitted by in the sunlight without one flutter of recognition. Then a clouded yellow sailed past, pursued by two rivals of her own swift-winged race; but the orange-tip fared on, never pausing to look at her. At a turn of the hedge, however, up loomed from windward a small yellowish butterfly, not much like himself, green and white underneath, fringed with black above, and without the orange spot which made my bright little friend himself so attractive. In a second he recognised her as his predestined mate, the one kind created for him. While I looked, all at once the whole world was one maze—in and out—in and out; those two pretty things, circling and flickering together, were in the thick of their courtship—he, rising on the breeze and displaying at each turn his beautiful orange wings; she, coquetting and curvetting, dancing coyly through the air, now pretending to fly away, now affecting disdain, now allowing him to overtake her, with quite human coquetry, and now darting off again on evasive wings, just as he thought he had captivated that capricious small heart of hers. So they went on for ten

minutes with their aërial minuet; and when I last caught sight of them, they were still circling undecided in graceful curves above the sprays of wild rose in the hedgerow by the river.'

'Very nicely described,' Sir Emilius observed, with a smile; 'but where does it lead us?'

'To the central mystery of falling in love,' Hubert answered, very seriously, undeterred by his uncle's bantering tone and raised eyebrows. 'The thing is a miracle. For you must remember that that orange-tip was born and bred a small green-and-white caterpillar. He never knew, as you and I do, that his father and mother were orange-tip butterflies before him. He never beheld any previous generation. He emerged from the egg, a tiny, hungry grub, long after his parents were dead and forgotten; and when he crawled abroad into the world, he met none of his own kind, save a few other creeping green-and-white caterpillars. He ate and slept and never dreamt of wings or of the future butterfly. At last, one day as he sat on his native plant, a curious change came slowly over him. He found himself melting away into a boat-shaped chrysalis. A film grew over him. There he lay, as in a mummy-case, growing gradually and unconsciously into a full-formed butterfly. Yet, how did he know, when he emerged from the cast shell, that he was a male orange-tip? Still more marvellous, how did he know the female of his own species? He had never beheld his own wings in a glass; he had never beheld any image of his beloved. Yet, the moment he emerged from the solid mould in which he had

undergone his strange transformation, he flaunted his wings at once by inherited instinct, so as to display the orange patch he had never himself beheld there! And when butterflies of other kinds appeared on his path he took no notice of them; yet the moment a mate of his own swam into his ken, he instantly and unerringly recognised his chosen helpmate. Now, I call that a miracle. And I call it also the best clue we have to all the mystery and philosophy of love-making.'

'It all amounts to saying,' Sir Emilius interposed, with a faint dash of cynicism, 'that every species knows its own female.'

'It amounts to a great deal more than that, Uncle Mill,' the young man continued, with a young man's enthusiasm. 'You persist in omitting the central element still—the fastidious selectiveness. How does my orange-tip know when he has lighted on the mate prepared from of old for him? Must he not have somewhere within his tiny brain and nervous system an inherited form or mould, as it were, which answers exactly to the image of his own kind, and of the counterpart prepared for him? When any other image falls upon his vague little eyes and senses, he fails to respond to it. But when the image of his own type falls upon his retina, it fits the inherited form or mould absolutely, and he rushes to make love to the creature that fills it, with intuitive certainty. The moment the ancestral mould is completely met and satisfied, the creature that meets it he loves as instinctively as Miranda loved Ferdinand—the

first man save Prospero on whom her eyes had lighted.'

'Shakespeare is not evidence,' Sir Emilius murmured, with a contemplative nod. 'The case of Miranda lacks objective confirmation. Besides, what you say comes still just to this—that each kind falls in love not with alien forms, but with its own species.'

Hubert stuck to his point. 'Still,' he answered warmly, 'you are omitting the selectiveness. Love distinguishes and discriminates. Even the little female orange-tip is not ready to accept without demur the advances of the first stray suitor who presents himself. She picks and chooses. What do all her coyness and coquetry mean but just such picking and choosing? She pleases herself in her choice of a lover. Not only has she imprinted on her tiny brain an inherited image of her kind as such, but also an inherited image of the exact type of her kind which best suits and delights her individual idiosyncrasy. For, mark you, Uncle Mill, it is not all pure caprice. This picking and choosing, again, is there for a reason. It is only the most beautiful, the most perfect, the most agile, the most effective that get selected on the average, and such selection increases in the long run the beauty, agility and effectiveness of the species.

Mrs Egremont sat by, listening with a curiously attentive face. As a rule, Hubert's talk with his uncle on these abstruse subjects lay on a plane a little above her range of interests. But his theory to-night somehow seemed to engage her. 'You remind me,'—she began, and then broke off suddenly.

'Of what?' Hubert asked, turning quickly towards her.

Mrs Egremont hesitated. 'Well, I have heard the same thing discussed before,' she said very slowly, 'from another point of view, and what you said just now reminded me so strangely of—the person who discussed it.'

'Still, all this reasoning amounts to no more than what Darwin taught us long ago,' Sir Emilius insisted. 'I don't see that you advance the matter one step by these idyllic instances.'

'What is true of the species is true of the individual too, I fancy,' Hubert went on, half dreamily. 'Is it not the fact that for each one of us everywhere there is somewhere a counterpart, an affinity, as Goethe rightly called it in a phrase now vulgarised out of all serious meaning, but still a phrase that encloses, even so, a kernel of truth beyond all power of vulgar destructiveness? I don't mean necessarily one affinity alone, but a relatively small number of possible affinities. Is it not the fact that, just in proportion as we rise in the scale of being, we find, at every fresh grade, a fresh stage or level of selectiveness—a further narrowing down of the possible range of choice and of attraction? Among the lower animals, for example, any mate will suffice; with the higher, æsthetic preferences begin to come into play, and give us at last such visible results as the plumage of the peacock, the bird of Paradise, the argus pheasant; as the song of the skylark, the linnet, the nightingale; as the grace of the fallow deer,

the crane, the squirrel. To this do we not owe the antlers of the stag, the crest of the heron, the colours of the humming-bird, the love-cry of the night-jar? So, too, among men. With the savage, almost any one squaw is as good as another; he discriminates little between woman and woman. The rustic begins to demand, at least, physical beauty; higher cultivated types are progressively fastidious; they ask for something more than mere ordinary prettiness—they must have soul, and heart, and intelligence, and fancy.'

'There's something in that, no doubt,' Sir Emilius admitted, half grudgingly. 'Your doctrine is, in short, the old and discredited one—that marriages are made in heaven.'

'Marriages are made in heaven,' Hubert answered, accepting his phrase. 'True marriages, that is to say; for a marriage that is *not* made in heaven is no marriage at all. It belongs—elsewhere. Higher men and women feel intuitively that only here and there in the world, perhaps in some cases only in one person, can they find all the qualities necessary to unite with and supplement their own; and for that one person, surely, it is fair to say that heaven designed them. This consciousness of fitness, this sense of something instinctive within one, drawing one irresistibly to one particular soul, is it not, in the last resort, the voice of Nature telling us clearly what mate the powers that rule the universe have built and fashioned for us? To neglect its bidding, to step aside from its impulses, to disobey its orders for mere human reason, these are surely rebellion

to the divinely-appointed monitor we each carry within us. The man or woman who allows any other consideration, save this of immediate fitness for one another, to interfere in marriage does obvious wrong—at least, so I take it. Money, rank, position, prospects, differences of creed, differences of race, differences of class, differences of language, the wishes of parents, the arrangements of property—what are any of these to the inner voice of God and duty?’

‘But if a woman has been coerced?’ Mrs Egremont put in eagerly. ‘If she has been compelled by her parents, while she is still too young and unformed for independent action, to marry a man whom she hates and loathes, as often happens, what hope for her then, Hubert? How do you treat her case? What is her proper course, her right plan, her duty?’

‘She should leave him,’ Hubert answered, without one second’s hesitation. ‘No other path, it seems to me, is open to her. For what can be more criminal than to become the mother of a child by a man whose idiosyncrasy is at war with your own, a man whom your own tastes and sympathies and senses proclaim to be unfit for you?’

‘And if he is rightly distasteful to her,’ Mrs Egremont went on, leaning forward, with a flushed cheek. ‘If he is, for example, a drunkard, or a gambler, or a forger, or a rake, or a man of cruelly brutal instincts, you think she should not live with him? She should cut herself adrift from his hateful presence?’

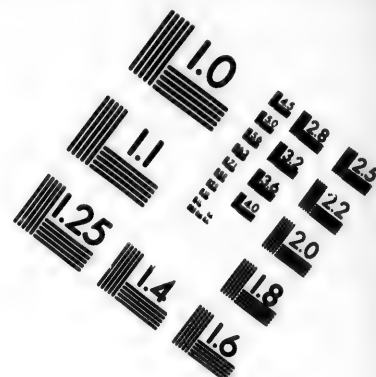
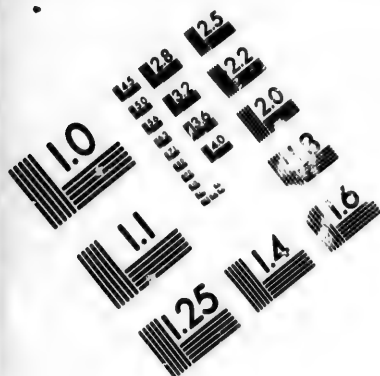
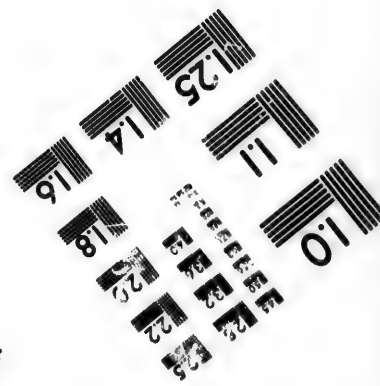
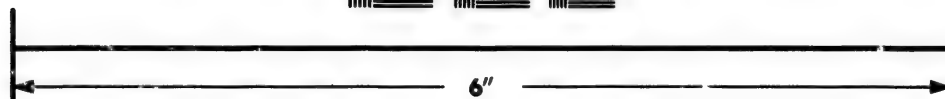
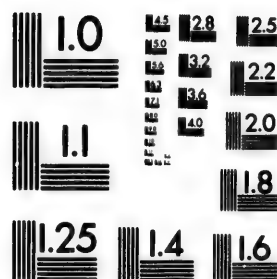


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'Of course,' Hubert answered calmly. To him this was all mere speculative opinion. 'That is her clear duty. Ought she to people the world with children tainted from their birth, and spoil her own nobler or better qualities by admixture with vile and low and unworthy ones?'

Sir Emilius glanced at his sister with an air of concern. He saw in her eye a strangely harassed look which was by no means uncommon there. 'Julia, my dear,' he said, gazing hard at her, 'you are tired to-night. If I were you I wouldn't sit up any longer. You need a good night's rest. And this talk of Hubert's is disturbing—with the clock on eleven. Sleepless people should never exercise their brains after dinner. I *never* exercise mine—in the evening I am always strenuously lazy—and I sleep like a top from twelve to eight, without one minute's intermission.'

Mrs Egremont drew a deep breath. 'Perhaps you are right, dear,' she answered, laying her hand on her brother's arm, 'though there are dozens of other things I should like to ask Hubert.' She hesitated a moment, then took up her candle reluctantly. 'Good night, my darling,' she said, kissing him twice on his forehead. 'Hubert, of one thing I am perfectly certain, that you have chosen wisely in choosing Fede.'

Sir Emilius, with his keen instinct for reading faces and voices, was instantly aware that she said it in part to cover her obvious emotion, and make Hubert think it was *his* marriage, not her own, that she had sighed over so profoundly. But Hubert

did not notice it. Sir Emilius's eye was keen for passing emotion: Hubert's, for the deeper-seated underlying facts of race and temperament.

She glided silently through the door into her bedroom, which communicated with the *salon*. Sir Emilius dropped his voice. 'You see these things too exclusively, Hubert,' he said, settling down in his chair again, 'from the physiological standpoint. You forget there is a social standpoint as well—quite equally important. We can't regulate our marriages wholly from the point of view of the efficiency of the race. We have to think of personal considerations also.'

'Such as what?' Hubert asked, pouncing down upon him.

Sir Emilius hummed and hawed. 'Well, considerations of social convenience,' he answered at last, with some hesitation. 'The laws and conventions of civilised society. We can't marry our cooks or our footmen, can we?'

'If a man *wants* to marry his cook,' Hubert answered, with plain common sense, 'one of two things, I think, is pretty certain. Either he's a man just fit to marry a cook, or else his cook is a woman quite fit for him to marry.'

'In the first case,' Sir Emilius mused, 'it doesn't much matter, I suppose; and in the second, there's no reason why the woman shouldn't rise to her proper station. Well, you may be right there, my boy. I'm not prepared to argue it out with you at this hour of the evening. But don't you think your doctrine is liable to lead on to all kinds of immorality?'

'What do you mean by immorality?' Hubert inquired, inexorable.

Sir Emilius paused again. 'Well, to a good deal of chopping and changing in marital relations,' he answered, with an evasive subterfuge.

'I think,' Hubert retorted, 'if all men and women formed real attachments of native preference while they were young and plastic, there would be no real immorality at all in the world; they would choose instinctively the persons best fitted for them, and would, in the vast majority of cases, never feel the want of any other affections.'

'Suppose they did, though?' Sir Emilius urged. 'Suppose, for example, that a woman is married to a man whom she grows to despise; and suppose that afterwards she is thrown in with another towards whom she gradually develops a deep attachment; don't you think on your principles—'

'Well?' Hubert murmured, half smiling.

'Don't you think it very likely she might . . . prove unfaithful.'

Hubert's smile deepened. 'Unfaithful to whom or what?' he asked. 'Herself—or her husband? She proves unfaithful to the man, as things are, under such circumstances, doesn't she? Whereas, under the system of things that would result from unrestricted natural marriages, she would not be likely, if she were a good woman, ever to form a union that was not destined to be permanent. As for bad women, they will be bad women, I fancy, no matter what artificial rules you make to bind them. No doubt a pure-minded woman—imagina-

tive—sensitive—married to a bad man, and thrown in with a better one—'

'Would lose her purity,' Sir Emilius suggested, as Hubert cast about in search of a phrase for a moment.

'No,' Hubert said, with decision. 'Such a woman *could not* lose her purity; she would only lose what we foolishly call her virtue. She would be loyal to herself and disloyal to her husband. But which is in nature the greater crime, do you think?—for a woman to step aside with a man she truly and deeply loves, or to become the mother of Nature's bastards by a man to whom she is married, though she loathes and destests him?'

'Dangerous! Very dangerous!' Sir Emilius murmured. 'You play fast and loose with sin. You undermine the foundations of civilised society.'

'You know what George Meredith makes one of his characters say under such circumstances?' Hubert put in, still smiling faintly—"The real sin would have been if she and I had met, and—"

'And what?' Sir Emilius asked quickly.

'Meredith doesn't say,' Hubert answered. 'He is wise enough to break off. He leaves it to the reader to finish the sentence. But surely, uncle, there are positive duties in life as well as negative—things which it would be wrong of us to leave undone, as well as things which it would be wrong of us to do—for the sake of the future of the world and of humanity.'

'I fail to follow you,' Sir Emilius said, in a decided voice, taking up his bedroom candle.

'If it is a duty to abstain from peopling the world with the unfit,' Hubert urged, following him up, 'is it not equally a duty to do what we can towards peopling it with the fittest?'

'Hubert, darling,' a tremulous voice broke in from the bedroom, '*would* you mind speaking just a little lower? I can hear all you say, so you keep me awake—and, for Fede's sake, I do so want to be bright and fresh to-morrow.'

But Sir Emilius could hear that the voice in which his sister spoke was one of profound, though sternly repressed agitation.

Hubert took an English weekly paper up to his bedroom. He read himself to sleep over the review of a novel. 'It seems alike unnatural and incredible,' said the reviewer, 'that a woman of the high character of Iris should have consented to live in any relation but absolutely legal wedlock with any man.' Hubert did not know who Iris was, or what he might have thought of her conduct if he had read the story. But the remark cast a flood of light on the psychology of the reviewer. What on earth had Iris's high character to do with the question? If he had said, 'a woman so prudent as Iris,' 'so self-seeking as Iris,' 'so cautious as Iris,' Hubert would have understood it. But 'a woman of the high character of Iris!'—it was really too absurd. He went to sleep smiling at it.

CHAPTER VII

MATRIMONIAL BUSINESS

AT breakfast next morning, Fede wore the white rose Hubert had pinned the night before into her evening bodice. It had somehow unaccountably got crushed meanwhile—behind the rhododendrons; but it revived in water, and looked *almost* as well as ever in the pretty pink blouse she wore down to breakfast. Only Mrs Egremont (being a woman) noticed its tumbled condition, and mentally accounted for it with a motherly smile; for Mrs Egremont had been young, and was young enough still to sympathise with lovers.

Fede certainly was charming. The mixture of the hot Italian woman and the bright English girl in her made a delicious compound. 'A co-inheritor on one side with Dante and Giotto,' Hubert said; 'a co-inheritor on the other with Shakespeare and Darwin.' As she smiled across the table, with a flush of timidity on her dark olive cheek, at her future mother-in-law, Julia Egremont felt she had never yet seen any girl so attractive. It is seldom one's children choose the wives one thinks fit for them; but if Mrs Egremont had been asked to select for Hubert, she could not have picked out anyone more to her taste than Fede.

'And then just look at her antecedents,' Hubert said to her with pride, when they met in their *salon* three minutes before breakfast. 'Could anyone have a better or finer record? Her father is a Torna-buoni; and you've only to look at him to see at a glance he is straight, and well-built, and noble, and honourable—an Italian gentleman to the core, every inch of him! And her mother, an English lady—a Warwickshire Hampden, indirectly descended from the great John Hampden, and belonging therefore to one of the soundest and ablest families in England. I don't care twopence myself about family from any other point of view: of course, I don't want to marry the last girl of a decadent stock, not if she were the daughter of a hundred silly or drunken earls; but surely, *noblesse oblige*, and a physiologist at least ought to take care he's marrying into a good sound stock that will do credit to his children.'

'Besides which,' Uncle Emilius added maliciously, 'you're in love with Fede.'

'It's the same thing,' Hubert answered sturdily, not yielding one jot or tittle of his argument. 'If people fall in love, that shows they're eternally meant for one another. They're the pair whom Nature designs to unite. It's your loveless marriages that do all the harm. Considerations of money, convenience, rank, birth, and religion—those lead to unions with no final reality in them. But I'm in love with Fede—because Fede is good and beautiful and sound and strong and attractive; which means, she is the girl I ought to marry.'

'Q.E.D.,' Uncle Emilius responded, with his hand

on the door. 'After which, I propose to go down to breakfast.'

The Marchese, however, took a more mediæval and commercial view of married relations than Hubert. As soon as breakfast was over, he drew Uncle Emilius aside into the *salon* of number twenty, and requested the honour of a few minutes' conversation alone with him. Being a man of business, he saw at once that Uncle Emilius was more likely to give dispassionate consideration to practical details than Hubert himself in his present condition.

The interview was satisfactory. 'Then I quite understand,' the Marchese observed at the end of it. 'Mrs Egremont's estate, being worth what you say, is absolutely entailed on the children of the marriage. The Property is not at her own disposal. It follows the name. And she has no other child but Mr Hubert.'

'Precisely,' the doctor answered, stroking his chin after his wont. 'And I believe—I do not know—but I believe—and will ascertain—that my sister desires to make a proper and ample provision, meanwhile, for the Marchesa Fede.'

'After her death—your sister's, I mean—Mr Hubert must necessarily inherit everything?'

'Yes, absolutely everything.'

'Her husband was a military man, I understand?' the Marchese continued tentatively.

'Colonel Egremont?—he was. He had served in India.'

'A colonel? So! I must telegraph full details

of the arrangement, you see, to Florence.' And he made a little note of it.

Sir Emilius looked doubtful. 'Well, between you and me,' he remarked, after a pause, stroking his chin with one dubitative hand, 'I don't know that I would make a great point of the Colonel. He was—well—a bit of a scamp, I'm bound to admit. There are black sheep, you see, in every family. He gave my sister a good deal of trouble.'

The Marchese was a man of the world; and besides, he knew the exacting morality of these extraordinary English. With them, a married man—but there. No Tuscan gentleman could ever endure it. 'Oh, of course,' he answered diplomatically, 'we understand these things. Military men have a code of their own. And in India, too, you say! Those very hot climates!'

'But Hubert,' Sir Emilius went on, with avuncular pride, 'Hubert's a young fellow to be proud of. He carried everything before him in science at Oxford. He's a rising physiologist, sure of election to the Royal Society. And—he's also a poet.'

'A poet! That's bad,' the Marchese cried, drawing back. 'These poets play ducks and drakes with their money.'

Sir Emilius assumed at once his blandest air—the air with which he assured the nervous lady-patient there was nothing on earth the matter with her digestive economy. 'But, my dear sir,' he put in, 'the man of science in Hubert outbalances the poet. It's a capital mixture. Enough imagination

to save him from being dry; enough steady ballast to keep him from being wild and mad and reckless. He's my favourite nephew—like one of my own boys to me!

This was an opening for the Marchese to explore the question of contingent remainders. 'Then you have children of your own?' he interposed dubiously.

Sir Emilius drew one weary hand across his ample brow. 'Children?' he cried. 'Oh, dear, yes! My quiver full of them! In fact, I may say, twelve go to the quiverful.'

The Marchese made a mental note of the fact. No windfalls from *that* quarter! 'Well, you'll excuse my being business-like,' he said, with his expansive smile, stroking the black moustache pensively. 'We Italians treat these affairs from a strictly legal standpoint. And in the present depressed condition of the wine-market'—the Marchese delivered those well-worn words in his most impressive style—he had had much practice—'before I allowed matters to go a step further between Fede and your nephew, I felt I must understand his financial position.'

He paused a moment, expecting Sir Emilius to inquire in turn what provision he meant to make, *per contra*, for his daughter's future. But, to say the truth, Sir Emilius, like a true-born Briton, had never even conceived that a 'foreign' nobleman could make any provision of any sort for his family. The moment he heard Hubert was going to marry the daughter of an Italian marquis, he made up his

mind it must be a pure love-match, and put considerations of money out of court entirely. For it is the fixed belief of Uncle Emilius's kind that all foreign noblemen are penniless adventurers, perpetually on the look-out for a British heiress or an American millionairess, to keep the pot boiling. So he merely observed in an acquiescent tone, 'We may gather, then, Marchese, that you offer no obstacle?'

The Marchese jumped at this view of the question. 'I offer no obstacle,' he answered, with an air of the greatest magnanimity; though, as a matter of fact, he would have been prepared to make a settlement upon Fede if Sir Emilius had asked for it. 'You see, if my daughter were an only child we could afford to do more for her; but as she has two brothers—'

The idea struck Sir Emilius as novel—nay, almost brilliant. An Italian nobleman portion his daughter who was marrying an Englishman! Original, really! 'Oh, we're perfectly satisfied as to that,' he said, smiling. 'The provision my sister means to make for the Marchesa will be ample—ample. The fact of it is, my nephew is *in love* with your daughter; and all we require is your consent to the marriage. That being given, I think nothing else need detain us.'

'Certainly not,' the Marchese replied. He rose from his chair and began to move round Mrs Egremont's *salon*, in which they had been sitting. A photograph in a frame on the mantelpiece caught his eye. 'Ha, an old friend!' he cried, taking it up and looking at it.

Sir Emilius nodded. 'Yes, the great American poet,' he said. 'You knew him?'

The Marchese expanded visibly to the naked eye. 'When he lived at Florence—yes; I knew him intimately. Who that loved Italy did not know the poet? Who was not proud of his love for our country?'

'But I thought you had a feeble opinion of poets?' Sir Emilius put in maliciously.

The Marchese snapped his fingers. 'As sons-in-law, yes, I grant you. But, *him*! ah, there, he was a Man, your poet!'

'He was,' Sir Emilius admitted with caution.

'We count him our own,' the Italian continued enthusiastically. 'Look what he did for Italian unity!' He put his hand on his heart. 'We are business-like, we Italians,' he went on, 'but we are not ungrateful. Your poet forged a golden chain which linked together Florence, London, America. After Mazzini and Garibaldi, what man of our time so deeply stirred the soul of Italy?'

Sir Emilius was unprepared for such a burst of emotion. The Englishman keeps all his sentiment for the family: the Italian bestows it rather on his country. 'He was an intimate friend of my sister's,' he said drily, distrusting these transports. 'She admired his work. She carries his portrait about with her everywhere.'

'*In* a silver frame,' the Italian added, looking hard at it.

'Eh? Quite so,' Sir Emilius answered, not grasping his meaning.

The Marchese mused aloud. 'This world's an enigma,' he said. 'Yet sometimes one gets a clue that leads one through it.—Well, well, Sir Emilius, I think we perfectly understand each other. Suppose we adjourn for awhile to the writing-room, where we can get pen and paper, and reduce the terms of our agreement to writing? For this being a marriage, you see—an affair of importance—we must of course leave nothing to feeling, but treat it in every way as a matter of business.'

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNEXPECTED INTERVIEW

WHILE the two men of business were engaged on these practical details in the *salon*, Mrs Egremont, Fede, and Hubert had slipped out into the garden. For awhile they kept together; but after twenty minutes or so, the mother dropped quietly and naturally into the background—she knew her place, she said to herself with some tinge of a mother's irrepressible feeling when she first finds herself relegated to a secondary rank in her son's estimation—and allowed the young people to wander off by themselves among the roses and rhododendrons. She would write a letter home, she thought, under the shade of the trees; and she beckoned to Rosa, the round-faced chambermaid, from the window to come to her.

'Bring me the writing-case from number twenty,' she said, 'and a postage-stamp for England. The concierge will give you one.'

'Yes, madame,' Rosa answered, in her most insinuating voice. 'And madame's shawl, *n'est-ce pas?* Madame may catch a chill if she sits under the trees here.'

'Oh, thank you,' Mrs Egremont answered, with her soft, subdued smile. 'How thoughtful of you, Rosa!'

The girl tripped away, with the affected mincing step of the Bernese chambermaid when tricked out in her finery; and was back again in a minute with the writing materials and shawl, as well as a foot-stool. She arranged it carefully under Mrs Egremont's feet, with obtrusive politeness.

'Oh, thanks, Rosa,' the lady said, with another gentle smile. 'How very kind and good you always are to me!'

'Oh, madame,' Rosa answered, in her insinuating voice; 'it is always a pleasure to do anything for madame. Madame is so gracious!'

She moved up the steps again. As she passed, the concierge muttered, 'You *do* make up to her!'

Rosa smiled and tossed her head. 'Last chance for the season!' she answered flippantly, in quite a different voice, and in her own broad dialect. 'She's good for twenty francs. If I carney her enough, she may make it forty. Besides, I'd like to get a good place in England!'

It is the modern Eldorado of Bernese chambermaids. It may lead to apotheosis—marrying the butler!

Mrs Egremont sat writing some minutes in silence. Her letter was full of Hubert and Fede. The girl was a dear girl—a very dear girl—and yet, of course, it was hard for a mother to lose the chief place in her boy's affection. But she was more than satisfied; it was wrong of her even to hint her personal feelings. She was ashamed to think she could be so selfish.

As she wrote, a figure glided silently across the lawn. It was clad in a shabby old tourist tweed suit and it walked with some difficulty, lifting each foot with care, as is the habit of men in the middle stages of locomotor ataxy. The hoary old reprobate had breakfasted in his room, and had stolen out at last in search of an opportunity for carrying a scheme he had planned into execution.

He stole up to her so quietly, with cat-like tread, that he was close by her side before Julia Egremont saw him. His shadow on her paper first called her attention. She looked up, and gave a start of mingled surprise and terror.

'What! Walter?' she cried. 'You here! Oh, for God's sake, what do you mean by it?'

The Colonel drew himself up jauntily.

'Yes, my dear,' he answered, fixing his eyeglass in his eye, 'it's me; or, to be more strictly grammatical, it's I, at your service. "An unexpected pleasure," you say. Well, an unexpected pleasure.' He drew back a pace and gazed at her. 'You hardly supposed you'd see me in this out-of-the-way place, did you?' he went on, with hateful banter. 'Oh, no, of course not. In point of fact, that's exactly why you came here. You avoided Florence, for fear of meeting me. How did I find out your plan? I see you asking yourself that mental question. Well, it's as simple as getting drunk, and much less costly. I was over at Lugano, boring myself to death in a bad hotel, and baking myself to blazes, when I happened to see your respected name in the *Swiss Times* on the visitors list at the Black Eagle. "A rare chance," thought I

to myself, "of seeing dear Julia!" When a man's been separated so long from his wife, the sight of her name naturally produces in his mind an immediate access of deferred affection. He takes the arrears out, so to speak. So into the train I jumped, took the Gotthard to Goeschenen, walked over the pass, didn't kill myself on the glacier, descended on the valley, and—here I am at last, my dear girl, to adore you!

He held out both hands, palm outward, in an imploring attitude. But his face was all mockery. Mrs Egremont rose from her seat in an agony of terror.

'Oh, go, go, go!' she cried. 'How *could* you be so imprudent? What should I do if Hubert were to come up and see you? He's here at the hotel with me.'

'So I saw in the newspaper. And, to tell you the truth, that seemed to me an additional reason for paying my respects to you. It's high time the boy knew his own father.'

Mrs Egremont wrung her hands.

'Walter,' she moaned, 'you are merciless.' She cast her eyes about her hastily, as if looking for shelter. 'You have broken your compact,' she went on. 'Didn't you promise me faithfully you'd never come north of the Alps without leave? Don't I pay you five hundred a year to live away from England? Haven't I got your own name to the agreement on paper?'

Colonel Egremont eyed her through his eyeglass with a complacent smile. 'Well, I'm not north of the

Alps, am I?' he answered, gazing about him at the mountains with unruffled geniality. 'I'm here in the midst of 'em. Jolly fine Alps, too; as large as they make 'em. Besides, if it comes to that, didn't *you* promise once to love, honour and obey me?' He held out his arms once more with mock pathos—that loathsome, bloated man. 'Do you love me *now*?' he asked. '*Do* you honour me? *Do* you obey me?'

Mrs Egremont shuddered.

'God help me, no!' she cried, with a wild gesture of repugnance. 'How could anyone love or honour or obey such a creature as you are?'

The Colonel was cool as indifference could make him. 'Very well, then,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'There you are, my good woman. You see how you keep your own promises, Julia.'

His wife recoiled from him. His very look repelled her. 'It was a wicked and a foolish one,' she said. 'I ought never to have made it. Promise to *do* or not to do, if you will; but promise to *feel* or not to feel—what a transparent absurdity!'

Colonel Egremont surveyed her satirically through his *pince-nez*. 'And this, I suppose,' he said at last, 'is the New Morality.'

The unhappy woman sank into a seat and half-covered her face. 'I don't know whether it's new or old,' she answered, shrinking from him. 'But this I do know, that I cannot possibly have any feeling now but disgust and loathing for you.'

Colonel Egremont dropped into a rustic seat, and unbuttoned his coat. 'Oh, pray go on,' he observed,

in a sarcastic voice. 'Don't trouble about me. Forgive my intrusion. Excuse me for existing!'

His wife rose wildly again, and approached him in her despair. 'No, finish it off at once,' she cried, pulling out her purse. 'How much do you want? Name your own price! I know one thing alone ever brings you near me. Say what you demand, and go. But don't shame me before Hubert. If *he* were to come — oh, my God, it would kill me!'

'No, it wouldn't,' the Colonel answered, with the air of one who has tried, and knows. 'It takes a good deal to kill a woman. You're too tough for that, by half. Besides, you needn't be in such an unseemly hurry.' He assumed once more his mock-pathetic tone. 'Why accuse your own lawful husband of mercenary conduct?' he asked, holding out both hands in a theatrical appeal. 'Is filthy lucre everything? Don't you allow *some* weight to the strength of the natural affections? It's five years since we had the mutual pleasure of meeting. It will, doubtless, be five years more before we have a chance of that pleasure again. Let us enjoy at least some little interchange of social amenities before we proceed to the dull and dry details of pecuniary arrangements.'

Mrs Egremont drew back from him. 'Are you absolutely heartless?' she murmured.

'Not at all, my love; not at all,' the creature replied, with that unspeakable ogle. 'I'm insisting on the sacred privileges of domestic intercourse. It's you, my dear, who display a base desire to reduce

the relations between us to the barest rudiments of a commercial basis.'

He lunged forward, awkwardly, with an attempt to kiss her. Mrs Egremont sprang back with a wild little scream of horror. 'Walter,' she cried, 'you're drunk!' And she tore herself away from him.

'Why, of course; yes, I'm drunk,' the man answered, laughing hoarsely. 'You don't suppose I was going to take the trouble to get sober, just because I was coming to see *you*, do you? But I'm not so drunk as usual by a long way, for all that.' He drew himself up with tipsy solemnity. 'Matter has three states,' he said, 'solid, liquid, and gaseous. *I* have three states—drunk, very drunk, and dead drunk. I'm only just simple drunk at present; and that's quite as much as you could expect from me, Julia.'

He drew a step closer. Mrs Egremont held out her hand to repel him. 'Stand off, sir!' she cried. 'Don't come one pace nearer, and don't presume to address me by my Christian name! Take your money and go! If you don't respect *me*, you might at least respect Hubert.'

She glanced around her, terrified lest Hubert should come up. But Colonel Egremont only gazed back at her with a vacant smile. 'Might I, really?' he murmured. 'What! get sober for Hubert? Oh, no; hang it all, I'm as sober this moment as ever I mean to be.' He drew himself up for a moment. 'Do you remember when I had charge of the casting at Woolwich Arsenal?' he inquired.

'Do I remember?' his wife answered. 'Can I ever forget it?'

'Well, don't you recollect, if we once let the fires down in the blast-furnace, it took us a week, and two hundred tons of coal, ever to get them back properly into working order. Now, I'm just like a blast-furnace. If once I got sober, it 'ud take me a week, and two dozen of brandy, to get comfortably drunk again.'

Mrs Egremont's fingers trembled on her purse. She looked round her once more with a piteous glance. 'Oh, Walter!' she cried, 'for heaven's sake, have mercy upon me! Name your own price; but name it quickly!'

Colonel Egremont gazed down through his *pince-nez* most contemptuously on the purse. 'What, gold?' he said. 'Notes? Do you take me for an idiot? Do you think I came all the way from Lugano for *that*? No, no, my dear Julia, I value the domestic affections a world too high to dream of curtailing this delightful visit under a couple of hundred pounds. I suppose you have your cheque-book?'

'A couple of hundred pounds!' Mrs Egremont echoed. 'Walter, it's impossible.'

'Impossible! Not at all! Or—I come back to Milworth. Now, don't look so appalled; and don't plead poverty. When I married you, you had a nice little fortune of your own, dear lady. Consider how you've treated me. We'd lived only five years together, like a pair of turtle-doves—coo, coo, and nestle—when, all at once, you refuse me the privilege of residing with you any longer.'

'Because no self-respecting woman could degrade herself one day more by admitting your presence in her house, Walter.'

The Colonel took no notice of the interruption, but continued his monologue. 'And as you had, by settlement, the power of the purse—all through your father's confounded pig-headedness—you extort from me an absurd and ridiculous bargain that I must pass my winters at Nice, Cannes, Algiers, Monte Carlo, and my summers in the Apennines or Lord knows where, so long as it's a good three hundred miles away from you. I ask you, is that the right way to treat the man you promised to love, honour, obey, and cherish? Well, now, I've broken loose! I'm not going to stand it! I'm a free man, am I not? I'm an English gentleman?'

'You were once,' Mrs Egremont answered, surveying him despairingly.

The Colonel drew himself up with military pride. 'And I mean henceforth,' he said, 'to resume my proper place in society. I will no longer accept your miserable pittance.' He reeled for a second, and steadied himself, repeating once more the words, 'miserable pittance.' 'That's not intoxication,' he went on; 'that's this beastly ataxy. But my terms are simple—two hundred down, I say, and an advance to a thousand a year in future!'

'Walter, I can't do it. The estate won't stand it.'

The bloated face was wrinkled with a cynical smile of disbelief. 'It won't do,' the man answered, shaking his head. 'You can't come it over *me*. I know that silly cry—agricultural depression. Everybody uses

it now as an excuse for meanness. But it won't go down here! You must pay up, I say—or take me back at Milworth.'

Mrs Egremont's face was deadly white; but her voice was resolute. 'I will not pay you,' she said. 'I will not—and I cannot.'

The Colonel sprang forward unsteadily, and seized her wrists in his hands. He was a powerful man still, in spite of the ataxy. 'You won't pay up, won't you?' he cried, in a threatening voice. '*We'll* see about that!' He wrenched her wrists hard. 'Will you or won't you?' he cried angrily, twisting them.

'Let me go, sir,' Mrs Egremont exclaimed, with a little cry of pain. 'Remember, if Hubert comes and finds out who you are, you lose your last hold on me. Only for his sake do I allow you anything.'

'Will you sign?' the Colonel asked, giving her wrist another wrench.

'I will not,' Mrs Egremont answered, in great pain, but immovable. 'Oh, let go; you hurt me!'

'I *mean* to hurt you. Sign?'

'Take your hands off me, I say! How dare you touch me?'

The Colonel wrenched again. 'I won't let you go,' he said, 'till you've promised to arrange with me.'

'Never!' Mrs Egremont cried, 'never!' She lifted her voice and called aloud in her torture, 'Emilius! Emilius!'

Next moment, an apparition of a dainty morning dress round a corner of the shrubbery—and—Fede and Hubert stood full in view of them.

CHAPTER IX

THE COLONEL SCORES

HUBERT saw nothing but a man—a vile-looking man, the hardened drunkard of the previous evening—holding his mother's wrists and evidently trying to bully her. In a second, he had rushed forward and seized the fellow's hands. 'Stand back, sir!' he cried, flinging him off. 'How dare you? How dare you?' And he threw the Colonel aside with a violent effort. 'Mother, what does this mean?' he exclaimed, gazing gently at her. 'Who is this man that's frightening you?'

The worst had come! At sight of her son, Mrs Egremont sank back, pale and trembling, into her seat, and covered her face with her hands, shame and fear fighting hard in her. 'Oh, Hubert, what shall I do?' she moaned aloud, through her sobs. Then she turned to the Colonel. 'Go, go,' she wailed again. 'I can't stand it! Go!' And she trembled violently.

Hubert faced the man again. The Colonel posed there, with an affected air of gentlemanly indifference. 'Explain, sir!' Hubert cried, confronting

him. 'How dare you lay your hands on this lady?' And a twitch in his foot displayed his first impulse.

Colonel Egremont drew himself up with a conscious effort. 'You demand an explanation?' he said slowly, facing him.

'I do,' the young man answered, hardly able to address him.

'No, Hubert, no,' Mrs Egremont moaned, pleading, and holding his arm.

'I demand it,' Hubert answered again, laying one soothing hand on his mother's shoulder.

'Then you shall have it,' the Colonel replied, with what shred of dignity was left him. He drew a card from his pocket, and handed it to Hubert. '*There* is my name, young man,' he went on in a very deliberate way. 'This lady is my wife. And you, I presume, are my son—Hubert Egremont.'

Hubert glanced at the card in a whirl of amazement. The world swam round him. 'Colonel Walter Egremont, late Royal Engineers!' He turned, half faint, to the drooping figure on the seat. 'Mother, mother,' he cried, 'what does it mean? Who *is* this man? How dare he use my father's name—my father's?'

Mrs Egremont bowed her head in a fierce burst of remorse. 'I did it for your sake,' she answered, cowering. 'Oh, Hubert, don't hate me for it. What he says is true, my boy. I *married* that creature! He *is* my husband!'

Hubert drew back, appalled. One hand was on

his forehead. He scanned the man over from head to foot, disdainfully. Colonel Egremont tried to stand before his gaze without reeling. '*Your husband!*' Hubert echoed. '*My father!* That thing! That creature! Oh, mother, can you mean it? Don't say so, dear mother!'

The quaver in his voice was concentrated agony. Mrs Egremont dared not raise her eyes to meet her son's. She only murmured again, 'For your own sake, my boy, I tried to hide it from you. I paid him to keep away. I have paid him for years. You know why now. What he says is true. This man is *my* husband.'

'And *your* father,' Colonel Egremont added, with malicious satisfaction.

'But he died—he died twenty years ago!' Hubert broke out wildly, unable to believe the hideous truth, now he heard it.

'So she told you,' the Colonel answered, with a smile of triumph. 'So she told you, no doubt. But'—he dug his own ribs demonstratively with his thumbs—'I venture to say, she was quite mistaken. I'm alive and kicking. I can kick hard still, thank heaven. Oh, she poses, of course, as a model mother. But she's brought you up, my boy, on a pack of lies. Come to your father's bosom, my long-lost son!' He stretched out his arms melodramatically—then reeled again, and caught hold of the rustic seat with one hand to balance himself. 'We have been too long apart!' he went on. 'This woman, this wretched woman, has separated us!'

'Sir!' Hubert cried, springing forward and raising one fist instinctively.

The Colonel retreated a step, and buttoned up his coat with significant symbolism. 'Oh, very well,' he said, 'if you renounce your own flesh and blood, of course I've nothing more to say against it. But you'll have to put up with me when I return to Milworth.'

Till that moment Fede had stood back, unperceived, among the rhododendrons. But as Hubert advanced with one fist raised to strike the wretched creature, she rushed forward to stop him. 'Oh, don't!' she cried, seizing his arm; 'oh, don't! Who is this man, dear Hubert?'

Hubert fell back on the seat, crouching. The full terror and horror of it came home to him at that moment. 'This man?' he repeated, only realising it by degrees. 'This man? Who is this man? Fede, Fede, my darling, go away, I implore of you! I can never be yours now. It's too hateful to face! Who is this man? My father! My father!'

Fede drew back, incredulous. 'Your father! oh, no!' she cried, 'he can't be *your* father! Hubert, Hubert, my darling, I don't believe it—I won't believe it!'

She flung herself upon him, embracing him passionately. Mrs Egremont, with her face in her hands, sat inconsolable by his side. Hubert bowed himself down in his abject wretchedness. The Colonel alone, bolt upright, with arms crossed

and a smile of victory, surveyed the whole group in an ecstasy of triumph.

'It is *that* that you have brought about with your *régime* of lies!' he said, slowly and bitterly. 'You have taught your son to hate and despise his own father!'

CHAPTER X

REACTION

HUBERT sat there immovable. It takes some minutes for revulsions of feeling like his to rise fully into consciousness. He sat there long, bowed down with utter shame, unable to look upon Fede's face, holding her hand in his, and endeavouring to realise this incredible catastrophe. Slowly the truth shaped itself at last in his mind. He began to understand it. His mother had married this hateful wretch—married him *how* he could not imagine ; and then, finding his company and his vices insupportable, had broken away from him, giving him an ample yearly allowance. But all these years she had hid the truth from her son, pretending her husband was dead ; and now that Hubert saw the man as he actually was, he could not wonder at it.

His son ! That man's son ! As the ghastly blind terror of it came home to him bit by bit, he rose up at last in his shame, withdrew his hand abruptly from Fede's, and rushed off in a wild burst of feeling to his own bedroom.

Mrs Egremont, for her part, did not attempt to

follow him. She sat there still, alone with her remorse, and bowed down in her agony. Nor did Fede seek to detain him. She knew these things are best faced in solitude. She took her future mother-in-law's hand in hers, and, without one word, stroked and smoothed it tenderly. As for the Colonel, having delivered his bolt, he thought it best to beat a strategic retreat for the moment. A little later, when tide served, he could arrange at leisure for his increased allowance, or, its only alternative, his return to Milworth.

For twenty minutes or more Hubert lay on his bed, tossed this way and that in a whirlwind of emotion. Yet the full shame and awe of the revelation broke over him but gradually. Not for several minutes did it dawn upon his soul that as he was in blood and bone this man's son, he was also the inheritor of his transmitted tendencies. The mere disgrace of calling such a creature his father was more than enough in itself for the first few dark moments; to inherit his taints, his vices, his diseases was more than he could take in without long reflection. And he had dreamt an hour ago of marrying Fede—he, that loathsome thing's son! It was past all thinking. He had but one consolation in this hour of gloom—that the truth had come out in time to save him from such ineffable sacrilege.

At the end of twenty minutes he could stand it no longer. Active natures need the outlet of activity at moments of profound and devouring emotion. Some inner spur goads them on to movement; they must walk it off, walk it off, walk it off for ever. Hubert

rose from his bed and broke out into the open air. He must move, move, move, up the sides of the mountain.

He stole out by the back way, under the trellis of dead roses, to avoid meeting either his mother or Fede. Then he turned along the track which led to the Rothenspitze. He had ascended it yesterday by the easiest path, on the opposite side, with the aid of a guide. To-day he would ascend alone by the abrupter face that turned towards the village. Good Alpine climbers held the mountain unapproachable by the slope; but what of that? It mattered little now whether he lived or died. If he fell and broke his neck, so much the better. That would be the easiest way out of an intolerable situation. In any case he must climb, he must climb, he must climb. Anything to get rid of this gnawing energy.

He set himself to work to scale it fiercely. As he rose on the first slopes, between grassy terraces, he could see his uncle and the Marchese walking along the dusty white road below, and entering the telegraph office. A hateful thrill ran through him. He knew what they were doing. They had settled preliminaries, and the Marchese was telegraphing the news to Florence. News of the marriage that could never take place! Marriage? Was he fit to marry the vilest creature in the streets? He, the drunkard's son, how could he ever have dreamed of that spotless Fede?

He could see her even now on the lawn of the hotel, by his mother's side, holding her hand and smoothing it with daughter-like devotion.

His mother! If he were his mother's son alone—as he had been till that day—how different it would all have been! He had known and loved and respected his mother from childhood upward. He had been proud to be her son, to feel he inherited her pure and unselfish moral nature. And now, this man! this unspeakable interloper! How could she ever have married him? How could she ever have consented to bring a child into the world who should share in such a creature's loathsome characteristics?

'If the man has a son,' he had said only twelve hours before to the concierge, 'that son is doomed to insanity before thirty.'

Insanity! Was that all? Vice, crime, drunkenness, brutality, paralysis. He might, perhaps, avoid by stern self-repression the drinking instinct itself, which wrought the curse; but how could he avoid the physical and mental taints, the hereditary tendencies of Colonel Egremont's moral or immoral nature? To some men the plea of heredity is a convenient excuse. Hubert saw far too deep into Nature for that fallacy. It was the opposite idea which troubled him most. '*I am* what I hate. I am, potentially, all that in my father revolts and disgusts me.'

He climbed on and on with restless energy, up straight walls of rock, where his foot hardly found a hold in slight cracks and crannies. He caught at sprigs of bushes growing out of tiny clefts, and helped himself up by their slender twigs, in the wild hope that they might give way and let him dash himself to pieces against the rocks at the bottom. But they

held, by a miracle. He never thought of how he climbed: his mind was seething now with so many fierce and conflicting ideas. He could not possibly have scaled that rearing wall of rock, alone and unaided, if he had attacked it consciously; but the unconscious clambering instinct of the boy and the monkey came out in him now that he was blind to danger. He climbed and climbed, scarcely knowing what he did. He could hardly have pointed out his own track again to any other athlete; and if he could have pointed it out, nobody would have believed him.

But all the time as he climbed one terrible sentence rang ever in his ear, 'Who visiteth the sins of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation.' Who visiteth the sins of the father on the children! The father on the children! the father on the children! He climbed to its tune. It haunted and followed him.

Insanity! Was he mad to try such a wild climb? Insanity! Was it some crazy impulse that drove him forth to-day, when he ought rather to have stopped to comfort and succour his mother? What was that man doing now—that man—his father? Then the terror grew deeper on him. Was it the inherited selfishness of the brute's brutal nature that had sent Hubert himself out to climb, climb, climb, instead of staying to protect his worse than widowed mother from the creature's outrages? And Fede—dear Fede—for whom he would give his life, was he right to leave her so? Ought he not to have tried to make the burden lighter for her? Yet—surely no!

He must never again see her. To see Fede and bid her good-bye was only unnecessarily to harrow her feelings. He *could* not face it. But was that, too, selfishness? How could he escape his own inherited character? How think himself outside his father's traits in him? Whatever way he turned, he ran his head once more against the great blank wall of his ancestral temperament.

Climbing, ever climbing, hour after weary hour, driven by such torturing thoughts, and biting his own arm now and again for relief, he gained the summit. But it took him all day, for the northern face was steeper by far than the usual path, and he clambered up by himself with numerous delays and endless difficulties. On the top, once gained, he rested, weary. He could not scramble down again without some hours of repose. He had no food or covering, and the wind was chilly; still, he must stop where he was till his limbs had recovered from their fatigue and stiffness. He was bruised and torn, and he was glad of his hurts: the physical pain seemed to relieve the mental. It acted as a counter-irritant. By this time, he had fully walked off his first restless mood, which began to be succeeded by a terrible depression. Evening came on. The peaks grew dark. The white blossoms shone with a strange internal light, as if they were self-luminous. He lay down on a bed of flowering daphne and saxifrage—close Alpine plants, swept short by the wind, which made a sort of spring cushion for his head and limbs—and looked up at the sky in listless indifference. His brain was all a blur,

his eyes ached wearily. Still, he did not sleep, but mused to himself, in a deadly monotone, 'Who visiteth the sins of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation.' At moments of emotion, the Bible words of our childhood recur to us. They come with the sanctity, the solemnity, the power of ancestral echoes.

The night was cold, and he was only a few hundred yards below snow-level. Now and then, to warm himself, he rose and walked about restlessly on the little rocky platform that formed the summit. As he did so, he kept stumbling over loops of root and gnarled stocks of low bushes. His heel struck against stones: he almost fell. Did he lift his feet as high as usual, he wondered? At the thought a chilly shudder came over him all at once. That shuffling gait—that indecision of step—was it not one of the premonitory symptoms of locomotor ataxy?

Not for himself he cared, but for his mother's sake—and Fede's. How could he dream, such as he was, of ever marrying Fede?

The night wore away slowly. He lay down again and watched it. Cold dews fell upon him. The stars came out, one by one, moved slowly across the zenith, and westered by degrees till they set behind the rearing white mass of the Himmelberg. He could see its whiteness now by their rays quite easily. Strange, how at moments of overpowering emotion, other thoughts will yet obtrude themselves now and then in shot threads across the woof of consciousness! As he lay there and watched those

silent constellations crawl with stealthy pace in measured spaces athwart the face of heaven; he realised, as he had never realised before, why astronomy was the earliest of all the sciences to force itself upon the mind of primitive man—the sleeper under the open, the watcher of the sky through roofless nights of summer and winter. When the early hunter lay awake, even so, and tossed on his uneasy couch, and counted the groups that followed one another with even, unhurrying tramp across the sphere overhead, how could he fail to note the slow sequence of their movements, the invariable order of their secular rising and setting? Hubert absolutely envied those ignorant savages. If only he could have thrown himself back into their place and forgotten these terrible lessons of modern physiology! But no—the doom was pronounced against him — pronounced by those immutable laws of nature, which, like the God of the Hebrews, visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation—though, unlike him, they show no mercy to any, whether he love them or hate them, whether he keep or keep not their mute commandments.

Gradually, morning approached. Hubert knew from the stars in sight that dawn could not be far from reddening the horizon. By this time an alternative feeling possessed him; he was painfully conscious now into what an agony of terror he must have cast his mother. His thoughts rambled in a haze. He rose once more, and by the uncertain light began to grope and feel his way

down the treacherous mountain. One false step would solve the insoluble problem. Now was the chance to slip; now was the time for an unintentional and half-unwilling suicide—for he was not quite at the point where he would knowingly and intentionally have flung himself down on the rocks below. From that last resource of hunted lives he shrank even then with real moral repugnance. But if only he could miss his foothold and fall against his will—how easy an outlet such an accident would afford him from an insupportable dilemma!

Dawn primrosed the sky. Once more the white flowers on the slopes glowed as if self-luminous. He clambered recklessly down, clinging to twigs and ledges that seemed all but hopeless. Yet he never missed his foothold. Perhaps the very absence of fear and of the sense of danger which his weariness of life and longing for death gave him may have acted as a preservative. If he had clutched at those slender supports in any terrified or half-hearted fashion they might have yielded and let him go; but the recklessness itself with which he trusted to their flimsy aid made them adequate for his purpose. He swung from them as lightly, as surely, and as easily as a squirrel or a monkey. He had recurred to the level of the boy or the savage, who risks a life which he values little. Day broke as he descended the steep face of rock; at the base of the first great pinnacle he could already see his track with perfect distinctness.

Thenceforth his way was easy. He shuffled and stumbled down much more quickly and surely than

he had mounted. It was about nine o'clock by the village church when he found himself once more in the one long gleaming street of Rothenthal.

And he was not dead. And he had cleared up nothing. The situation remained exactly where it was before he started, except that he had no doubt succeeded in casting his mother and Fede into transports of fear for his immediate safety. Selfish, selfish, selfish! No doubt, a son of that unwelcome father!

CHAPTER XI

THE ENGLISH FOR FEDE

IN Mrs Egremont's *salon*, about nine o'clock, Cecco, the Marchese's valet, peeped in at the door, where Rosa was engaged in dusting the furniture.

'Good morning, signorina,' he said in Italian, just poking his head somewhat tentatively round the corner.

'Good morning,' Rosa repeated in her own Teutonic variety of the Tuscan dialect. She was a cosmopolitanised Bernese, and spoke most European languages in a more or less broken fashion.

'The young signore not yet come back?' Cecco inquired with curiosity.

No,' Rosa answered, playing carelessly with her duster. She pretended to be busy with the objects on the mantelpiece. 'He left a note on his table for Number Twenty, to say he had gone up for a climb on the Rothenspitz, and might be out all night. But Number Twenty doesn't like it, I'm sure of that: she's been crying all night, I think: her eyes are red and swollen this morning.'

'Something's gone wrong,' Cecco murmured, venturing in a step or two.

'This is Number Twenty's *salon*,' Rosa observed in her coquettish way, looking round at him with a warning glance. 'She'll be out here presently.'

'No, she won't,' Cecco answered, taking another step in. 'She's gone out on the terrace, looking for Twenty-Four. There's something wrong somewhere, as you say, signorina. Our young lady has been crying, too, ever since yesterday morning.'

'It's odd,' Rosa continued, pausing awhile and fronting him. 'I think the horrid old man in Seventy-Two must have something to do with it.'

Cecco dropped his voice to a confidential whisper. 'You know why we've come here?' he said. 'There's a marriage to be arranged between our young lady, the Marchesa Fede, and—'

'And Number Twenty-Four; well, I knew that already, silly,' Rosa answered, brusquely.

'Who told you?' Cecco inquired, drawing yet a step nearer to her.

Rosa flicked her duster. 'Who told me?' she answered. 'Well, I call that a good one! Do you think I've been eight years a chambermaid, and must wait to know things till people tell me?'

'But yesterday morning,' Cecco went on, 'Number Twenty-Four and Number Seventy-Two had a talk together, and ever since then there's been nothing but misfortunes. The young signore has gone off up the Rothenspitze; our Marchesa's in tears, the picture of misery; the signore's mother is crying her eyes out; and my Marchese's walking up and down in his room, swearing at me all the time as if it were an earthquake in Florence!'

'Hateful old man!' Rosa cried. 'I mean Seventy-Two. I should just like to know what he has to do with them. It's he who has come and made all the bother.'

'Perhaps he's Twenty's husband,' the valet suggested, with a gleam of white teeth.

'Oh, no, he's not,' Rosa answered, still dusting coquettishly at the vases on the mantelpiece, 'for I heard madame say something to Twenty-Four—that's her son—about his father having died at least twenty years ago.'

'But she may have married again, stupid!' Cecco retorted.

'Stupid yourself! If she had, how could she and her son be both called the same name? They're all of them Egremontes.' She pronounced the word as four syllables, Italian fashion.

'That's true,' Cecco answered, pondering. 'Then perhaps he's her lover.'

Rosa pouted her lips. 'You don't understand the Inglese,' she answered, candidly. 'That's Italian manners. The English ladies *never* have lovers, signore.'

Cecco nodded his head. 'True!' he assented, after a pause. 'I quite forgot that. Droll manners, those English! One wonders what they live for. You seem very much interested in the family, signorina.'

Rosa tossed her pretty head. 'Nobody else in the hotel!' she answered. 'One must interest oneself in something. Besides, I rather want Twenty to take me with her as lady's maid to England.'

'To England! Ah, well, perhaps then we may meet there, for my Marchese is sure to carry me with him to England for the wedding.'

'But the wedding will be in Florence, won't it? at Santa Croce or Santa Maria?' the chambermaid suggested.

'Trust my Marchese for that!' Cecco cried. 'He's a man of business, my Marchese, and "in the present depressed condition of the wine-market"—he imitated his master's most pompous manner—'ten lire to a soldo he'll put the expense of his daughter's marriage on Number Twenty's shoulders.'

Rosa was dusting a photograph on the mantelpiece as he spoke. It was the portrait of a tall and handsome man, close-shaven and clear-featured and very distinguished-looking. It stood in a silver frame. 'I think this must be Number Twenty's gentleman,' she said, after a pause. 'She keeps it here always in the middle of the shelf, and she often looks at it. It is no doubt the signore her husband.'

'Oh, no,' Cecco put in. 'That man's name's not Egremonte. I know him well. He was a friend of my Marchese's. That's the great American poet who died at Florence when I was lift at the Minerva. He used often to drop in for our *table d'hôte*. I remember him well. He was a very great man. He gave me five lire once for posting a letter for him.'

'He's handsome,' Rosa said, scrutinising it. 'So he was a poet, was he? The signora has his photograph in her bedroom as well, with some verses on the back of it. Perhaps he wrote them. But the

verses are in English—or perhaps in American—so I cannot read them.'

'Well, you see, he was a distinguished man,' Cecco replied, full of importance. 'Oh, distinguished—but distinguished! His friends were proud of him. A poet's a poet. When the King of Italy—the Re Galantuomo, I mean, Vittorio Emmanuele, not this man Umberto—when the King came to Florence, the poet was always asked to dine at the Pitti Palace; and when he died, the American ambassador came on purpose from Rome to attend the funeral. So I ask you, was he distinguished? He must of course have been a very clever poet. Such brains those men have! It makes one dizzy to think of it.'

'Take care,' Rosa said; 'I hear the signora coming.'

Cecco retreated with dignity from the room. One moment later Mrs Egremont and Hubert entered it.

'You can go, Rosa,' Mrs Egremont said, pale and white, but still with the external calm of an English lady.

'Yes, madame; at your service, madame,' Rosa answered, in her official voice, and beat a retreat, curtseying.

'Mother,' Hubert cried, taking her hand, 'I—I have caused you so much trouble. Can you ever forgive me for it?'

Mrs Egremont sank into a chair. 'I knew you would come back, my boy,' she said, with a quivering lip, 'unless you slipped by accident. I knew you would not—intentionally—kill yourself.'

You knew that, mother?’

Mrs Egremont hesitated. ‘Yes, I knew it, my boy—but—’

‘But what?’

She faltered. ‘I thought,’ she said, after a pause, ‘you might try—half unawares—to let your foot slip on some damp piece of rock, and be dashed to pieces.’

There was a moment’s silence, then Hubert answered, ‘It would have been better so, mother.’

Mrs Egremont flung her arms round him. ‘No, no, my darling,’ she murmured. ‘For my sake, no—for my sake—and for Fede’s.’

‘Where is she?’ Hubert asked, trembling.

‘In her room.’

‘Was she very much frightened?’

‘No. She has confidence in you. She knows in her heart you could never desert her.’

Hubert paused again. ‘Oh, mother!’ he cried at last, ‘I will not reproach you. Who am I to reproach you—I, that creature’s son! But why, oh why did you keep it from me always?’

Mrs Egremont’s brow heaved. ‘I thought it was for the best,’ she answered, faltering.

‘The truth is best,’ Hubert retorted. ‘I would always know it.’

‘The truth is best?’ Mrs Egremont echoed, with a faint tremor of the lips. ‘Oh, Hubert, *do* you think so?’

There was agony in her voice—doubt, terror, longing.

‘It was kind of you to try, I know,’ Hubert went

on, not perceiving it. 'I see you wanted to shield me—oh, my God, from what? I can't bear to think of it. From what I am in myself! From knowing the truth about my own inmost nature!'

Mrs Egremont leant forward. 'Hubert, my darling,' she broke out, 'for years I have borne this trouble in silence for your sake—and every other trouble. I have done all I could to hide it from you, till the world itself had almost forgotten his very existence.'

Hubert rocked himself to and fro. 'But oh, the terrible awakening,' he cried, 'from the ideal I had formed in my heart of my lost, dead father! No, *I* did not form it; *you* gave it to me, mother.' And he swayed himself moodily.

Mrs Egremont's lips trembled as if she must answer something; but with an effort she suppressed it. 'Oh, is the truth really best?' she cried at last. 'I wonder, I wonder. Is the truth really best? Hubert I dare not.'

Hubert gazed at her again. '*You*, my mother!' he cried. 'How could you ever bring yourself to marry such a man? How could you so far dishonour your own fine nature? How could you consent to spend one day of your life with him?'

Mrs Egremont bowed her head. 'Hubert,' she cried, 'don't recall to me my shame! Don't remind me once more of it! Don't reproach me, my boy! You will crush me if you speak of it.'

'Reproach you!' Hubert answered, with bitterness. 'If I reproach *you*, I reproach myself—I reproach that man whom I know to be my father.'

Mrs Egremont wrung her hands. 'Consider how young I was,' she went on, in an evasive voice. 'Only seventeen when I married! My mother was determined to get me off her hands to somebody; and Colonel Egremont, who was a friend of hers, happened to be the first man to make me an offer. Ask Emilius about it all: he will tell you how it was. I was delivered over, an innocent girl, bound hand and foot, to that wretched creature.'

'Mother, mother, if it were I, I would have cut my right hand off first!'

Mrs Egremont paused. 'But you never knew my mother, Hubert,' she answered slowly. 'She was a terrible woman, my mother. Hot and cold by turns—passionate and cruel. Everybody who came near her did as she told them. She ordered me to marry Colonel Egremont, and I obeyed her as implicitly as I would have obeyed her if she had ordered me to shut the nursery door. I was hardly out of the nursery, indeed, when she married me off to him. I'll tell you how it happened. I had been at school—here in Switzerland—so happy, so happy. I came back when I was seventeen, not having seen my mother's face for three whole years; and, full of delight at finding myself at home again, I rushed into her drawing-room in Hans Place, and flung my arms round her, crying aloud, "Mother!" She was sitting there, as it happened, with one of her admirers, a cabinet minister; she moved in that society, and was a very great lady: and she didn't like the interruption—for she was a handsome woman still, and couldn't bear to have a grown-up daughter

in the house with her. So she held me off, without kissing me, and said, in a freezing tone, "Your complexion's ruined! You're not half as good-looking, child, as you were three years ago. Go upstairs, and take off your hat, and wash yourself after your journey—and then, perhaps, you'll be in a fit condition to come down and say how-do-you-do to Lord Winstanley." I slunk off, chilled. That same evening she said to me, in a very cold voice, "Julia, I must marry you. It shall be Colonel Egremont." I didn't like him, though I didn't know him, of course, as I know him now; and I said, "Oh, mother!" "Go to your room, miss," my mother said, "and don't dare to answer me back." And in three weeks' time, whether I wished it or not, she had me married to Colonel Egremont.'

Hubert still rocked himself up and down. 'It was a dishonour to yourself,' he said, 'and a wrong to me. Epilepsy, insanity, drunkenness, paralysis—how could you burden your son with such legacies as those, mother?'

Mrs Egremont trembled. 'If you had known my mother, you would understand, Hubert,' she answered at last, with an effort.

'And even if you once married him,' Hubert went on, 'how could you continue to live with him? And how could you bring children of your own into the world for him—half his, half yours—hereditary drunkards, hereditary madmen?'

Mrs Egremont buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. 'Hubert, Hubert,' she cried, 'for heaven's sake, spare me!'

Just at that moment there came a knock at the door. 'May I come in?' Sir Emilius asked, half opening it.

Mrs Egremont raised her head. 'Yes, come in, dear,' she said hurriedly. She was glad of the interruption—glad of someone who would help her to bear the blight of Hubert's unutterable horror.

'My boy,' the elder man said, coming forward and taking his hand, almost as if he had heard what they had both been saying—though in truth he only read it with his accustomed skill in their faces—'don't reproach her with it; oh, don't! Surely she has suffered more than enough already.'

'I know it,' Hubert cried, seizing her hand and smoothing it. 'Oh, dear mother, I know it.' Remorse came over him.

'He wasn't so bad at first as he became later,' Sir Emilius went on, in a softer voice than Hubert could have conceived of his using. 'She left him as soon as she could—left him by my advice and assistance. He did things—fortunately—which made it impossible for him to show his face in England again; broke the law, and rendered himself liable to serious punishment. Your mother very properly bought him off on an agreement never to come within two hundred miles of her. He has skulked for years, sometimes under his own name, sometimes under another, up and down on the Continent.'

'But he went too late,' Hubert cried, in his misery. 'And—Fede and I must suffer for it.'

'Not necessarily,' Sir Emilius put in. 'You are a strong and well-built fellow, Hubert. It's unusual, I

admit, for such a man to be the father of a sound child; but I've never seen one trace in you, at least, of the inherited temperament.'

Hubert shook his head once more. 'No, no,' he said gloomily, 'it's no use your trying to comfort me, uncle. I know the truth too well. That man's children must be hopelessly mad before they're thirty.'

'I dispute your prognosis,' Sir Emilius answered. He spoke with authority. 'These cases are so elusive. The moral qualities lie on the surface of heredity. There isn't a sign in *you* of alcoholic tendency.'

'But I know it all so deeply,' Hubert cried, leaning back, 'as well as any doctor. The symptoms often remain latent till twenty-five or thirty, and then they come out suddenly. His children couldn't escape. I have seen with my eyes. He's too far gone in alcoholic mania to doubt it.'

'Hubert,' Sir Emilius said, looking hard at him, 'in spite of all you say, my advice to you is to marry Fede.'

Hubert moaned from his place. 'How can I burden Fede with such a future?' he cried in his despair.

Mrs Egremont leant forward with a sudden burst of speech. 'My darling,' she cried, 'take my word for it still. You will not believe it, but your father had once many great and noble qualities.'

Her brother stared at her. He knew that Julia had misled her son on this point for many years past, but he was hardly prepared for such a wildly improbable declaration at such a moment.

'Then again, I can never break it to her,' Hubert went on, in utter dejection. 'I can never make her feel how impossible it would be for me to dream of marrying her!'

Sir Emilius meanwhile had felt his nephew's pulse. 'My boy,' he said suddenly, 'you are sinking from inanition. You have neither slept nor eaten. This mood, I see, is partly physical. You must have some breakfast at once.' He took a flask from his pocket and poured some liquid out of it into the cup at its base. 'Here, drink this,' he said, handing it to him; 'you need it sorely.'

Hubert glanced at it for a second. It was brandy. The very smell of the vile liquor gave him at that moment a revulsion of disgust. He took the cup in his hands, and dashed it, brandy and all, to the other end of the room. 'Never!' he cried. 'Never! It is that hateful stuff that has brought all this upon us! As long as I live, not one drop of it shall ever pass my lips again!' He flung down the flask. 'If I can't escape the effects,' he said, in his frenzy of despair, 'at least I can avoid the cause of all this misery.'

'That's *your* son, Julia,' Sir Emilius murmured below his breath. 'Not a trace of Walter Egremont!'

Hubert rose and wrung his hands. 'Sophistry!' he answered. 'Sophistry! mere verbal sophistry. We can't escape the sins of our fathers so easily. Every man inherits one-half of his traits from either parent; from that creature I inherit inevitable insanity.'

As he spoke, there came once more a gentle tap at the door. 'Can I come in?' a low voice asked pleadingly.

'You can,' Sir Emilius answered, moving across to the door. 'A seasonable tonic! The precise treatment I was just about to prescribe for him!'

He opened the door, and Fede entered, very pale, and with eyes red from crying. The Marchese would have considered her presence at that moment a most imprudent proceeding.

She took his hand frankly. 'Dearest,' she murmured, leaning forward and kissing him, 'I *couldn't* stop away. I was obliged to come. I have thought of you all night long. I knew how you must feel about that—that dreadful creature.'

Hubert recoiled from her kiss. 'Oh, don't, Fede,' he cried, as if he shrank from her purity. 'I feel I am polluted—not fit for such as you. You must never again kiss me.'

She drew back, astonished. 'Why not, my darling?'

'Because that man's my father. Because I am his son. Because I inherit from him a deadly taint. Because I shall most likely be mad and paralysed before I'm thirty.'

With a wild burst of emotion, Fede flung her arms round him. 'Hubert! Hubert!' she cried, 'what is all that to me, dearest? I am a woman—no more. I love you—I love you! No matter *what* might happen to you, I still would marry you!'

He tried to unwind her arms. A ghastly sense

of his own inherited impurity came over him. 'Fede,' he cried, 'you mustn't—not to that man's son! What you say is quite right—quite right for you, dearest. A woman should take these things so; I see that very well: no good woman could take them otherwise. But a man must be strong. A man must fight against it. A man must guard the woman he loves against herself and her womanly instincts. A man must know when and how to deny himself. He must refuse to marry the girl of his choice—if marriage would mean to her inevitable misery.'

Fede clung to him passionately. 'But it wouldn't, it wouldn't,' she cried. 'I know you better than you know yourself, Hubert. My name is Fede, and Fede means faith. I have faith in you, darling. You're *not* that man's son—not in the sense you mean it. You're so good, so gentle, as well as so clever. I can *trust* you, Hubert—body and soul I can trust you.' He gave a gesture of dissent; but she clung to him still, and cut him short with a wave of her hand. 'My intuition tells me so,' she said, 'and I know I can rely upon it. My name against your doubts! My faith against your fear! My heart against your brain! My instinct against your reason!'

She tried to kiss him once more—tried to kiss him passionately. Hubert drew back with a wild look of terror. He held out his hand as if to protect her against himself. 'No, darling, no!' he cried. 'Not me—not me! You have kissed me for the last time! Never again, Fede—never!'

Fede dragged him down to her lips with a fierce burst of passion. 'Yes, you shall,' she exclaimed,

clasping him hard. 'You shall! You must, my darling!' And she drew him to her bosom.

At that inopportune moment the door opened suddenly, and Colonel Egremont entered.

CHAPTER XII

THE POINT OF VIEW

HE stood for some seconds just within the doorway, with his mock-military air, twirling his grizzled moustache, and surveying complacently the whole fam'ly group whom he had thrown by his action into its state of misery. The eyeglass, screwing up that bloated face, made him more hideous than even he would have been by nature. Then he spoke very jauntily. 'Sorry to intrude, I'm sure,' he said, with a hateful grin, 'upon this domestic party,—and at *such* a moment! But after all, we must remember, I'm the Head of the House—and'—spreading his hands pathetically — 'what is Home without a Father?'

He had evidently been drinking even more than usual, and his voice was thick; but he had still a strange air of affected *bonhomie*, and a triumphant manner.

Hubert sprang up with a fierce gesture. 'How dare you enter this room, sir?' he cried, moving forward.

The Colonel advanced a step, blustering. 'Upon my soul,' he said, bridling up, 'pretty sort of treatment for a long-lost parent! My own flesh and

blood to assault me in that fashion! Am I to be debarred from access to my wife's rooms, and violently attacked by my son on the threshold? If I were not the best-natured old reprobate in the world, by George, sir, I tell you, I'd lose my temper.' He gave a little start, and took a long look through his eyeglass at Fede. 'What, a joy for ever?' he exclaimed, with one of his odious leers. 'So *this* is your *fiancée*, then, is it, Mr Hubert? Why, I've been hearing all about her downstairs from the head-waiter. Good morning, my dear! Delighted, I'm sure, to make your acquaintance! A deuced good-looking young woman she is too, Hubert. As pretty as they make 'em! But the Egremonts were always famous for their taste in their choice of their womankind. I was a *connoisseur* myself in female beauty once. Look at your mother, my boy; devilish fine girl she was when she was a girl; and devilish handsome woman she is to this day, at forty odd—devilish handsome woman, though a trifle haughty!'

'Sir,' Hubert cried, unable to endure it, and placing himself full in front of the creature, with one fist raised warningly.

'Hot-tempered, isn't he, my dear?' the Colonel continued, with a nod to Fede. 'Can't restrain his emotions. But, children, you should never let—fie, fie, Mr Hubert! Allow me to introduce myself, my dear, as your prospective papa-in-law. We're to be relations, you know. My name is Walter Egremont; my address—Europe.' He moved suddenly forward, with a curious lurch, as if to kiss her.

Fede shrank back in terror. 'Oh, Hubert, don't let him come near me!' she cried, retreating, with a face of fierce repugnance.

Hubert caught the man in his arms and flung him bodily back. 'Stand off, sir!' he cried, growing red in the face. 'How dare you?'

Sir Emilius laid one hand on the intruder's shoulder. 'Now, restrain yourself, Walter,' he said. 'This is not a pot-house. Leave the room instantly, if you know what's good for you. I will talk matters over with you in the garden quietly.' For he was used to the insane, and he saw at a glance that the Colonel's mood was not far off from alcoholic insanity.

As for Colonel Egremont, he drew back a pace, reeling slightly as he did so, not so much from drink as from his nervous affection, and scanned Fede and Hubert up and down solemnly. 'A pretty pair,' he mused aloud, in a judicial tone. 'A very pretty pair! Upon my soul, I'm proud of them. Julia, my dear, this son of mine's a handsome, well-grown, up-standing young Egremont. The very model of the race! I always *did* believe in the doctrine of heredity!'

'Then how dare you become the father of a son?' Hubert burst out bitterly. 'How dare you reproduce your own vile image?'

The Colonel measured him up and down with his eye, and smiled. 'That's pretty straight, that is!' he answered slowly, as if trying to take it in. 'One in the eye for me! Pretty hot and strong! Prepare to receive cavalry! Julia, you haven't

brought your boy up to respect his parents. Train up a child in the way he should go—you know Mr Solomon. Signorina Marchesa, do you allow this young fellow to speak in such very unparliamentary terms of your future father?’

He took a step towards her again. Hubert darted upon him wildly. ‘Leave this room, sir,’ he cried, lifting the Colonel bodily and carrying him to the door. ‘You’re not fit to remain under the same roof with my mother and this lady. Though you were fifty times my father, if you speak like that, by God, sir, you shall answer for it.’

The Colonel, however, was still imperturbable. ‘Go on, young man,’ he cried, in a half-angry, half-mocking voice; ‘go on! Pray don’t be shy. Don’t mind my feelings—a father’s feelings! Say just what you please! Curse me to slow music!’

He half turned the door handle. Hubert and Sir Emilius followed him up menacingly. At the same moment, the door burst open suddenly, and the Marchese entered with a look of amazement.

‘Why, what is this?’ he inquired, looking about him, and taking it in. ‘Are we to explain in this way your unaccountable conduct, Mr Egremont? What is this man doing here? I suppose he’s the person you spoke about, Fede?’

The Colonel took advantage of the unexpected diversion to return to the room. ‘Yes,’ he answered, with slow maliciousness, delighted to display himself to the utmost disadvantage before Fede’s father. ‘Every family of distinction has a skeleton in its

cupboard,—and'—he adjusted his eyeglass—'I am the skeleton!'

The Marchese surveyed him with profound contempt from head to foot, and then held out one hand to keep him at a respectful distance. 'Well, and a precious ugly specimen too,' he answered, deliberately.

'Runs through the family,' the Colonel murmured, glancing with amusement from the Marchese to Fede. 'If *this* is Italian politeness—give *me* the refined and courteous London costermonger.'

The Marchese turned to Sir Emilius. 'If I judge rightly,' he said, in his coldest voice, 'when I arrived you were just engaged in ejecting this—person?'

'We were,' Sir Emilius answered frankly.

'Then why does he come back?' the Marchese demanded, in a rather acrid tone.

Colonel Egremont bristled up. 'Take care, sir,' he cried, blustering, 'how you venture to touch a British soldier!'

The Marchese took his measure with a rapid glance. 'Oh, if you elevate it to the dignity of an international contest,' he answered deliberately, 'though Switzerland *is* neutral territory—well, *evviva l'Italia!*' And with a sudden and dexterous advance, he seized the intruder in his powerful arms—for he was a very strong man—lifted him clean off the floor, and bundled him out unceremoniously.

Sir Emilius, with the coolness of a doctor in trying circumstances, turned the key in the door the moment the Colonel was safely outside it.

The Marchese addressed himself to Hubert, evidently ruffled. 'I hope, Mr Egremont,' he said, 'this awkward little episode may be made satisfactorily to account for your extraordinary absence at so critical a moment. My daughter has told me something of this creature. A most loathsome object! He lays some preposterous claim to being your father, doesn't he? A madman, no doubt. But why should his conduct have driven you to absent yourself with such marked discourtesy at such a juncture?'

Sir Emilius glanced at Hubert imploringly. But Hubert was true to his principle of fidelity to the truth. 'I *must* tell him, uncle,' he said, with a piteous shake of his head. 'I *can't* deny it!—Marchese, the man says what is simply true. He *is* my father!'

The Marchese smiled benignly. The avowal seemed rather to please him than otherwise. 'Oh, of course,' he answered, appeased, 'if he has happened to turn up at an inconvenient moment and upset your arrangements, I can easily understand there may be some reason for your singular conduct. I gather that a certain degree of coldness seems to reign within the family.'

'Let *me* explain,' Sir Emilius said blandly, fearing that Hubert might make things worse in his present mood of despair. 'This man, I regret to say, is really Mrs Egremont's husband. But I must also admit he is a rake and a drunkard. His financial transactions have also been—well, let us put it, imaginative. To say it in brief, he has disgraced the family. My

sister is compelled to live alone, and to pension him off, on condition that he never comes nearer England than Nice or Lugano. As he generally lives under an assumed name, and has had nothing to do for years with my nephew, we didn't feel bound to mention his existence heretofore to Hubert, who thought till now that his father was dead, and has only just learnt accidentally of his survival.'

The Marchese smiled a cynical smile. 'Don't apologise for that,' he answered. 'It does not concern me. It is Mr Hubert's absence that calls for an explanation, which will, no doubt, be forthcoming. For my own part, I don't like too much unity in a family circle. It's entirely *bourgeois*—shows the relations have never had any Property worth speaking of to quarrel over. From what you told me, I gather Mrs Egremont has, by English law, sole control of her own estate, and that this superfluous husband possesses no legal claim of any sort upon her.'

'That is so,' Sir Emilius answered. 'He lives upon her bounty.'

'Then,' the Marchese went on, with an air of relief, 'we may treat this unprepossessing gentleman as a mere cypher.'

Fede broke out in a sudden cry. 'But, papa,' she said, sobbing, 'Hubert doesn't see things like that at all. He thinks he's bound not to marry me if this man's his father.'

The Marchese turned round with a bewildered air. 'Thinks he's bound not to marry you?' he repeated. 'Not to marry a Tornabuoni! Why, why, Mr

Egremont? I ask you, yes or no? Has this man any claim on your mother's Property?'

'On her property?' Hubert answered. 'Not the least in the world, so far as I am aware.' The point of view puzzled him.

'The estate is absolutely settled on my sister,' Sir Emilius put in; 'with remainder to Hubert, as I have already explained to you.'

'Then where does the difficulty come in?' the Marchese continued, looking puzzled. 'Why *shouldn't* you marry her?'

'You don't understand,' Hubert cried. 'With a father such as that, how can I? How dare I? I am doomed beforehand to hopeless madness.'

The Marchese almost laughed. 'What, a fine young fellow like you,' he cried, 'with the limbs of a mountaineer and the chest of a Bersagliere! Sentimental nonsense!'

'You can't see it, I suppose,' Hubert murmured, 'with the eye of a physiologist.'

The Marchese was severe. 'No, but I can see it with the eye of a gentleman and a man of honour,' he answered, growing hot. 'I understand what you mean now. You mean to act like a cad to my daughter.'

Sir Emilius detected quickened action of the heart in the swollen veins of the Marchese's forehead. He interposed as composer of the rising storm. 'Wait a moment,' he said, with his bland medical manner. 'Marchese, you and I will talk things over together a little. Julia, my dear, leave us—and you, too, Marchesa. Hubert, take your mother out into the

garden awhile, and then come back to us. We must arrange this thing gradually. It's entirely a question of the point of view. Your points of view are different. I sympathise with both—and I will try to harmonise them.'

The Marchese bowed stiffly. 'As you will, signore,' he answered, with cold politeness. 'But this marriage is arranged now, and *cannot* be put off. I allow no going back upon the claims of my daughter.'

Sir Emilius bowed in return, and motioned Mrs Egremont and Fede to leave the room. Hubert went with them.

'Well?' the Marchese said coldly, looking across at his opponent.

'Well,' Sir Emilius began, 'Marchese, my nephew is deeply in love with your daughter.'

'Sir!' the Italian exclaimed.

'I mean,' Sir Emilius corrected, perceiving his error, 'Hubert's affections are deeply engaged to her. It is through no lack of will that he has doubts about his marriage.'

'I don't understand,' the Marchese replied, in his chilliest voice. 'If he is not going to marry my daughter, how dare he tell me he has feelings of affection for her? In Italy, Sir Emilius, we cannot permit such avowals. Either the young man means marriage, or else—' his hand sought an imaginary sword—'we settle these questions in that way.'

Sir Emilius tried another tack. 'Let me explain to you my nephew's idea,' he said, still bland as ever. 'He has—er—the profoundest admiration and respect for your daughter, Marchese. He desires to

marry her. But the sudden discovery of his father's degradation—for I will admit that Colonel Egremont is really a drunken and degraded creature—has given him such a shock that he has momentary qualms which his common sense will soon no doubt enable him to get over. He is a physiologist, you must recollect; too much a physiologist; and he fancies he must inherit his father's physical taint. Indeed, as a medical man, I am bound to admit that the chances in favour of any person who comes from a family so deeply tainted are usually—infinitesimal. Though in Hubert's case I have good hopes that his mother's fine physique—but I see you are impatient.'

'I am,' the Marchese admitted, fuming visibly. 'What has all this got to do with your nephew's arrangement to marry my daughter? It is for her to consider whether she will take the risk—which, frankly, to me seems, as you say, infinitesimal.'

'I—I meant the other way,' Sir Emilius corrected, taken aback.

The Marchese pursed his lips. 'Not at all,' he answered. His tone was acid. 'The matter stands thus. Mr Egremont has formally proposed for my daughter. I have accepted his offer. He now wants to back out, apparently—on a most frivolous pretext. As a man of honour, I cannot permit it.'

'He will not back out, I am sure,' Sir Emilius responded diplomatically. 'That is to say, when he recovers mental balance.'

'Not with impunity, certainly,' the Marchese answered stiffly. His hand moved once more towards his hip with a nervous movement.

'He is a fine healthy young fellow,' Sir Emilius went on, 'with excellent principles.'

The Marchese snapped his fingers. 'My dear sir,' he answered, 'you are altogether too English. We talk at cross purposes. What on earth do I care about your nephew's principles? What do I care about his heredity, if that's the right word for it? Heredity's all very well in its way, when you know the facts. But you never know them. Isn't marriage expressly invented to conceal them? It puts a premium on denial of paternity. Haven't you English an unusually sensible proverb about it's being a wise child who knows his own father?'

It was Sir Emilius's turn now to be shocked and insulted. 'My dear sir,' he exclaimed, bristling up, 'remember! my sister!' Nothing but the fact that the Marchese was *only* a foreigner could have restrained him from deeply resenting the imputation.

'Ah, yes,' the Marchese interjected. 'I forgot! In England, of course! You English are so impeccable. You have no romance, no love, no affection. These things don't happen, *chez vous*. Whereas we other Italians, you see—'

'Oh, with *Italians*,' Sir Emilius answered drily, drawing himself up, 'that's *quite* another matter. But north of the Alps, Marchese—'

'True, true,' the Marchese mused. 'And yet—there was your friend the poet. He caught the subtle aroma of life as it passed. And *he* was an Englishman. No, no, an American. Yet English and Americans are alike in that. But then I sup-

pose poets don't count. They have no nationality—just the poetic temperament.'

'He was the austere and purest of men,' Sir Emilius said, too surprised to be angry. 'Have you read his *Gwendoline*? What could be severer?'

'His poetry? Ah, yes. Most ascetic, no doubt. But his *life*—ah, there! I knew him well, Sir Emilius. He longed to be a saint—but he loved to be a sinner.'

'Well, Hubert, I believe, will get over this mood,' the Englishman went on, reverting to the matter in hand. 'It is a natural revulsion.'

'He *must* get over it,' the Florentine answered, 'or take the consequences. And you know what those are! Ah, here he comes to answer for it.'

As he spoke, Hubert entered, still as dejected and despondent as ever. Sir Emilius tried to prompt him. 'I have been explaining to the Marchese,' he said, in his most persuasive tone, 'that you are momentarily taken aback by this unfortunate episode; but that, after you have had time for reflection and consideration—'

Hubert shook his head firmly. 'No, no,' he answered. 'Let us be clear about this. If I am that man's son—I will never, never marry Fede.'

'You won't?' the Marchese cried, stepping closer.

'For her own sake, no,' Hubert answered firmly—'and for her possible children.'

The Marchese's face grew red. 'My dear sir,' he said, 'this is absurd, quixotic! You don't know what you're talking about. The marriage is arranged, and *must* come off now. I believed I was

dealing with persons of honour. I have telegraphed the facts to all the Florentine journals, as well as to my family, and have received in return the congratulations of the Sindaco. By this time, my daughter's engagement is the common talk of the Cascine. To break it off at such a stage would be, you must understand—as we Italians think—a direct impugment of my daughter's honour. Nobody would suppose you could go back upon your word now, except on grounds—which I decline to specify.' His face grew redder still. 'You can't play fast and loose in that way,' he added, 'with a Tornabuoni.'

'But for Fede's own happiness, Marchese'—Hubert began.

'How dare you, sir?' the Marchese cried, turning upon him. 'How dare you speak of the Marchesa, my daughter, as Fede to my face, in the very same breath in which you tell me you do not mean to marry her? Break it off? Not at all! The thing's simply impossible! What is her happiness, I'd like to know, to the honour of the family? Here on the Continent we have our ideas of honour. We treat our marriages as binding contracts. You shall not put a public slight upon my daughter's reputation. We meet a public slight—you know our way—by referring the matter to the sword or the pistol. If you persist in this course—this most absurd course—I must ask you the name of some friend who will act for you.'

Sir Emilius tried once more to throw the oil of pacification upon the troubled waters. 'Let this wear itself out, signore,' he murmured, touching

the Italian's arm. 'Hubert in his present condition—'

'I don't care a damn for his present condition!' the Marchese answered angrily, with idiomatic vigour. 'It won't do; I can't even discuss the subject. As a Tornabuoni, I am the guardian of my daughter's honour. No man shall insult her, while I live, and go unpunished. Your friend's name, sir; your friend's name! This has gone beyond mere talking!'

Sir Emilius made one more unavailing effort. 'It is for the Marchesa's own sake,' he said gently, 'that my nephew desired to break off the marriage. I think he desires it on mistaken grounds. He is too acutely apprehensive.'

'No, uncle,' Hubert answered, growing more fixed each minute. 'It is a matter of principle. I will not depart from the stand I have taken. My mother had no right to marry my father. Fede has no right to marry *me*. Though she beg and implore me, I refuse to put this grave wrong upon her.'

The Marchese raised his voice. 'Then you must take the consequences,' he answered haughtily. 'Give me the name of your friend—or I run you through, wherever I meet you, for your insult to my daughter.'

'Papa! papa!' Fede cried, rushing in and seizing his hand. The loud tones had reached her. 'Oh, Sir Emilius, separate them!'

Mrs Egremont followed the tremulous girl into the room. Her face was white as death, but terribly resolute. 'Hubert, darling,' she said slowly, standing between the two men, 'wait! Don't quarrel with Fede's father! Marchese, I implore you, allow me to

talk with my boy a little. I think I can persuade him. This may be arranged even now.' She spoke with resolution, but with deadly earnestness.

The Marchese looked down at her with icy politeness. 'Certainly, dear lady,' he answered, with Italian courtesy. 'Your sex can do much. Perhaps it may even assist you to persuade this headstrong young fanatic.' He paused for a second and mused. '*You* more than anyone else,' he added, after a second's thought. 'The entanglement is, perhaps, not quite so impossible as the signore fancies.'

Mrs Egremont waved Sir Emilius with one hand from the room. The Marchese bowed, and accompanied him. Fede clung to her new friend. 'Must *I* go too?' she asked pleadingly.

Mrs Egremont stooped down and kissed her tenderly. 'Yes, dear, you must go,' she said, in a very gentle voice, yet tremulous with courage. 'It is for your own sake, Fede. Wait for us in my bedroom. I will call you when I want you.'

'But nothing you can say will alter me, mother,' Hubert added, in a tone of abject despair. 'I have made up my mind. That person's son can never marry.'

Fede cast a glance at him as she left the room. 'Marry me or not, darling,' she cried, 'I am yours for ever. I shall be true to my name. My faith shall be faithful.'

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT CONFESSION

MRS EGREMONT flung herself in despair on the sofa. She trembled violently, and her lips quivered; but her air was resolute. Hubert seated himself by her side, his hands folded despondently.

'My boy,' the mother said softly at last, 'I have something to tell you—something I hoped never to breathe while I lived—though after I was dead I always meant that you should know it. I had written it down in my desk to tell you. But you *compel* me to speak now. I can't help it any longer. I can't delay it.'

'Go on, mother,' Hubert said gloomily, taking her hand in his. 'I am strong enough—and crushed enough—to bear anything now. Nothing on earth matters to me.'

'*This* will matter to you,' Mrs Egremont said, in a very grave voice. 'Oh, where can I begin?' She cast about for an opening. 'Hubert, help me, my boy. Can't you guess? Can't you spare me? Something that will enable you to marry Fede.'

Hubert looked at her, dull as a leaden sky. The English boy's implicit belief and faith in his mother prevented him for one moment from guessing the fact she was trying to tell him.

'Impossible!' he said. 'Impossible! I will not and cannot.'

The mother braced herself up for a painful effort. 'Listen, Hubert,' she said, speaking low. 'I was married at seventeen, as I told you this morning. What did I know of life then? I have explained to you *how*, and you have seen with your eyes to what sort of person. Married to a man I could not possibly love—a man I soon learned to hate and despise as much as I loathed him.'

'You might have been married to him,' Hubert answered slowly, 'but why did you consent to go on living with him? Every woman is the guardian of her own purity. To live with a man she loathes is a dishonour and degradation to her own body.'

'So *he* told me,' Mrs Egremont whispered. But Hubert was deaf. He could not understand her.

'Why did you live with him?' he went on, more in wonder than reproach. 'Why did you let him remain with you?'

'I did not—for one moment longer than I could help,' Mrs Egremont answered, whispering low. 'I bought him off, and sent him away, as soon as I was able.'

'A year too late,' Hubert answered. 'And *I* am here to prove it.'

Mrs Egremont clasped her hands. 'No, darling, no,' she cried. 'Bear with me, Hubert. I must tell it my own way, if I'm to tell it at all. Oh, how can I ever tell it? I lived with him, and hated him; but, thank God! I was childless. That alone consoled me. Four years after my marriage I went with him

to Venice. I had no baby yet, then, and prayed, oh, how fervently, I might never have one. To bear a child for *him*, I felt, would have been cruel—no, criminal.' She paused, and looked hard at her son. 'At Venice—' she went on, then broke off suddenly; do you begin to understand, Hubert?'

The young man nestled close to her. 'Go on,' he cried. 'Go on! I begin to suspect. You give me fresh hope, mother.'

'At Venice,' the mother continued, hiding her face in her hands, 'I met a Man—a very great Man—the greatest I ever knew—who fascinated me deeply. I admired and respected him. Hubert, Hubert, need I say any more to you?'

Hubert leaned eagerly forward. 'Yes, yes,' he cried. 'Go on! I must know it all—all! Tell me everything, mother!'

'You said you wished the truth,' Mrs Egremont moaned faintly.

'I wish the truth,' Hubert answered. 'By that we live. Go on, go on! I *know* it was well, mother!'

'He loved me,' the trembling woman went on. 'He loved me, and he told me so. I loved him, and I denied it. I thought it was wrong to love; I thought it was right to conceal the truth. But he found it out in spite of me. "We needs must love the highest when we see it," he used to say, and—I loved him with all the purest love of my nature. Two things I longed for—sympathy, and a child. He gave me sympathy, and he told me maternity was a sacred right and duty of womanhood.'

'He said the truth,' Hubert cried, drawing closer

and closer to the trembling mother. 'Till she has borne a child, no woman has realised her own whole nature.'

'He was beautiful and noble-hearted,' Mrs Egremont went on—'a leader among men; a teacher and thinker; and there, in those glorious streets, among those glorious churches, he taught me new lessons—oh, Hubert, dare I say them? He taught me it was wrong for me to remain one day longer under the same roof with the husband whom I loathed—told me in almost the self-same words as those you used to-day, that in yielding myself up to a man I despised, I profaned and dishonoured my own body.'

'Dear mother,' the son said, 'go on! I know all now; but tell it me; tell it me!' His voice was eager.

Mrs Egremont hid her head, overcome with womanly shame. 'He told me,' she whispered, 'I ought to trust my own heart, and defy conventions. He said the bond that bound me to that man was cruel and unholy. He spoke so earnestly, he loved me so purely, that, bit by bit, he overcame my scruples. I could not conceal it from myself or from him. I loved him to distraction.'

Hubert smoothed her hand with a gentle pressure, but answered nothing.

'One evening at Venice,' the mother continued, 'he pressed me close to his heart—his great beautiful heart—oh, close, so close; and he cried aloud to me, in a sense I had never before realised, those beautiful words, "Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The voice of God within us had joined

us, he said; man's laws and conventions should not avail to sever us.'

'I know that voice, too,' Hubert cried, leaning forward. 'I know those very thoughts. They are mine, mother, mine! I see the truth now. He *must* have been my father—that pure great soul, not the wretched drunkard. I recognise his spirit! Am I his son, dear mother?'

He said it caressingly. He said it eagerly. He said it as one asks some supreme favour. Mrs Egremont bowed her head, and dared not look him in the face as her lips answered low, 'How shall I tell you the truth? You *are* his son, Hubert!'

'And his name?' Hubert cried, pressing forward breathlessly.

'I can't say it aloud,' the mother replied, still trembling with anxiety; 'but—stoop down here—closer—at your ear—I will whisper it.'

She whispered one word in his ear. Hubert started, amazed. It was indeed a great name. 'What, the poet?' he cried, gasping.

His mother hung her head with a gesture of deprecation. 'Yes, the poet,' she answered.

In a revulsion of pride and joy, Hubert clasped her in his arms, and kissed her many times ecstatically. 'Thank you, mother,' he said simply. 'Thank you! Thank you!'

'Oh, hush, Hubert,' the mother interposed. 'Suppose anyone were to hear! Don't thank me for *that*! It was a sin, they say, a very great sin—and bitterly am I expiating it.'

'It was a splendid sin,' Hubert cried, clinging

fondly to her hand, 'and from my heart I thank you for it. Such sins are purer far than half this world's purity. It is love—and natural fitness—not the word of a priest or a law, that sanctifies. And the result shows it. To be that great soul's son—not the loathsome drunkard's!'

'My darling,' Mrs Egremont cried, now weeping bitterly with the reaction from that moment of effort, 'you frighten me when you say so. You don't know what pangs and remorse it has given me.'

'It need have given you none,' Hubert exclaimed. 'It gave you them only because you but half understood him. Your heart told you true. Your poet was right. He knew what was best. You have given me a noble and a glorious father!'

The mother clung to him still. 'Oh, Hubert,' she cried, 'if you say so, my boy, I am justified. He wanted to raise up a son like himself, he said. He wanted to raise him up by the woman meant for him. He told me we two were meant by nature for one another. But I doubted it still. You can't think what a relief it is to me now to have told you.'

'I trust the truth,' Hubert answered slowly. 'It is all so new and strange; but'—and he paused—'this, *this* is the father I had always dreamed of.'

'And I told you the truth,' Mrs Egremont added wistfully. 'I told you the truth, as far as I could tell it. Far more than you thought. I told you he was dead. I told you he was indeed a father to be proud of. I told you he had many great and splendid qualities. I told you half: but I could never tell you how great and pure he was—my love, my poet!'

'Does my uncle know?' Hubert ventured, after a moment's pause.

'Not a soul on earth but myself! I have hidden it in my heart—deep, deep, unspoken—ever since that white soul died ten years ago in Florence. But—I loved him—I loved him—oh, Hubert, how I loved him!'

She raised her head and looked her son in the face now. The knowledge of his approval had taken all sense of false shame away from her. It was his father's face. More than ever, she saw it so.

'And that man—your husband?' Hubert asked. 'The man to whom you were nobly unfaithful. Did *he* know what had happened?'

'He never even suspected it,' Mrs Egremont answered. 'He was far too drunk to know or to trouble himself about anything that happened. I left him at once as soon as—as soon as I was sure what was going to happen to me; as soon as I felt a new life within me. And *you* are the son of that moment of profoundest passion!'

She said it confidently now; she said it almost proudly. She saw, she felt the father in the son. She no longer shrank from him. 'Then all is easy now,' Hubert cried. 'I can marry Fede.'

His mother flung her arms round him in a transport of joy. 'I thank heaven I have had the courage to tell you,' she whispered. 'You can marry Fede. I would never have dared to tell *it*, though, my darling, if I had not overheard what you said the other night in this very room to your uncle. I have thought so often since of those glorious words you

quoted from Meredith—"The real sin would have been if she and I had met, and—" They comforted me deeply. So too did your own comment: "There are positive duties in life as well as negative. If it is a duty to abstain from peopling the world with the unfit, is it not equally a duty to do what we can towards peopling it with the fittest?" And she looked at him proudly.

There was another long pause. Each gazed on each with profound earnestness. 'And you forgive me?' the mother asked at last, with a momentary shrinking.

'Forgive you? Dear mother, I have nothing to forgive! I have everything to thank you for. You took care to ensure me a splendid birthright. One thing alone I regret.' He gazed at her wistfully. 'I shall have to bear that wretched creature's name through life,' he said—'instead of the one I am rightfully entitled to.'

'You will,' his mother said—'for *my* sake. . . . And for *yours*, I regret it.'

'So do I,' Hubert answered. 'But I will bear it still, for your sake alone—not for fear of the base lies that enslave and unman us.'

They leaned back and were silent. A whiff of tobacco smoke broke suddenly upon their reverie. Mother and son looked up with one accord. Again that unspeakably hateful apparition! Colonel Egremont was standing on the balcony by the open window, with arms akimbo, regarding them cynically.

CHAPTER XIV

COLONEL EGREMONT SEES HIS WAY

HE had a cigar in his mouth, but he withdrew it jauntily.

'Forgive this persistence,' he said, smiling. 'Family feeling! Family feeling! Restitution of conjugal rights is all I ask for. And—I've ventured to take it. When you locked me out of the door, my dear Julia, with such unnatural cruelty—you forgot it was easy for me to come in by the window.'

Mrs Egremont seized her son's arm. 'Oh, Hubert,' she cried, low, 'did he hear, do you think? Did he hear us?'

'I don't fancy he did,' Hubert answered, whispering. 'And if he did, I don't care. He is a drunken lunatic, or next door to it. Nobody would pay the slightest heed to his chatter.' He turned to the wretched creature. 'Leave the room, sir,' he said, pointing to the window by which the man had entered, 'or take your choice of being thrown out. I will permit no insolence.'

Colonel Egremont advanced a step. 'Take care, young man,' he cried. 'You touch me at your peril!'

Hubert was just about to seize him, when Mrs

Egremont intervened with an imploring look. 'For my sake, Hubert, let him stop! We can answer him now. We understand one another, my boy—you and I—and we have nothing more to fear from him.'

The Colonel stepped forward, looking about him gingerly. 'That Italian brigand's gone?' he said, peering round the chairs as if in doubt. 'Yes? Then here we are, *en famille*! We can proceed to business!'

Hubert shuddered at his breath. 'He's drunk, mother,' he said low. 'He reeks of brandy.'

'Well, yes,' the Colonel replied, drawing himself up with dignity, and squinting through his eyeglass, 'I do my duty in the matter of brandy. I flatter myself, I *am* the chief support of that vast industry.'

Then for the first time it began to dawn upon Hubert that the man's bravado was an initial stage in the form of madness known as megalomania, where the lunatic, at first humorously, but afterwards seriously, exaggerates to a gross and ludicrous extent the importance of all his own pettiest actions.

Mrs Egremont laid her hand on her son's arm gently. 'Don't bandy words with him, Hubert,' she whispered. 'Hear him out, and have done with him.'

'Exactly my own idea,' the Colonel answered blandly. 'Most excellent advice. Short and sweet just suits me. I come to the point. I'm here without funds; not a sou, not a rap, not a doit, not a stiver. I'm uncertain, I admit, as to the precise nature and value of the common stiver; but

I'm sure I haven't got one. So what I want to know is simply this, Julia. Are you or are you not going to find that two hundred pounds for me, and to increase the miserable pittance you allow me to a thousand a year?' He assumed once more his mock-pathetic air. 'Must I ask you twice about it?'

The touch of humour about the man, the comicality of his appeals, the very cleverness of his talk, increased his loathsomeness. He would have been a trifle less repulsive were it not for his good-humour. His horrid unconsciousness of his own utter degradation made Hubert recoil from him. 'Don't answer him, mother,' the young man said, appealing to her. 'On what ground does he ask for it? Why should he not earn his own bread like other people?'

'God bless my soul,' Colonel Egremont cried, 'what else did I marry her for? Is she to gain the privilege of having *me* as her husband, and bearing the honoured name of Egremont—one of the best in Lancashire—all for nothing? No, no, young fellow, I shall have my rights, I tell you. She had a tidy little fortune of her own when I married her.'

'Most of which you've long ago squandered,' Mrs Egremont said, interposing.

The Colonel poised himself blandly. 'Well, I've done my best, I acknowledge,' he said, 'to prevent you from wasting it on your own selfish pleasures. I've used it royally. Did you ever know me pander for a moment to the better elements of my nature, Julia? Still, we shared and shared alike in both our fortunes; so *that's* all even. With all my worldly

goods I thee endowed—fourteen pence in the pound to compound with my creditors—and *you* made up the deficit.'

'Promise him anything, Hubert,' Mrs Egremont cried, with a sudden rush of disgust; 'only, get rid of him instantly.'

'I will promise him nothing, mother,' Hubert answered sternly, 'and I earnestly hope you will not either.—Leave the room, sir, this moment, or I shall ring for the servants of the hotel to remove you.'

The Colonel struck a mock-tragic attitude. 'Then your sentence is for open war?' he said rhetorically.

'My sentence is for open war,' Hubert answered, with a contemptuous dash of the hand. 'I have nothing to do with you. You may try your worst. Anything rather than continue to disgrace my mother's rooms with your disgusting presence.'

'That's pretty hot,' the Colonel ejaculated, wiping his brow with the back of his hand, and gazing round the room for some imaginary spectator. 'Well, war let it be, then; I'm an old campaigner. But I won't begin operations without all due formalities. If we must be belligerents, I give you due notice, I mean henceforth to act upon the offensive. No more skulking about upon the Continent for me! I shall carry the war into the enemy's country. When next we meet, we meet at Milworth!'

'I accept your challenge,' Hubert answered. 'I am not afraid of you.'

The Colonel advanced yet a step. 'And mind you, Julia,' he said, 'when I come to Milworth, I

come to stay. I shall institute an action for Restitution of Conjugal Rights. By George, I mean it. You shall receive me again as your lawful husband.'

'You dare not show your face in England,' Mrs Egremont cried, flushing. 'You know you dare not! That bill of exchange—and those cheques of General Walker's!'

The Colonel smiled calmly. 'Blown over!' he said, with a wave of one hand. 'Blown over, long ago! I'm game to try, anyhow. There was only one man left alive in England whose evidence against me would have been worth twopence—that's Walker; and it may interest you to know that I saw his death in the *Times* at Lugano.'

He played that trump card with an insolent smile. He had come there, in fact, in large part to play it. Mrs Egremont shrank from him. 'But—the other things?' she said, hesitating.

The Colonel laughed. 'Oh, no,' he answered quietly. 'The public prosecutor isn't going to rake up old scandals like that at this time of day just to gratify you, my dear. He's had more than enough of them. The authorities prefer to keep those things quiet. Anyhow, I'll risk it. You shall see me back at Milworth before long, dear Julia.' And he kissed his hand to her.

Hubert could stand it no longer. He advanced and laid his hand on the old scoundrel's shoulder. 'You have said enough,' he murmured, in a very low voice. 'Now, go! We know your intentions. In my mother's name I tell you plainly, you shall not have one penny now, nor one penny ever if you come

to Milworth.' And he pushed him backwards forcibly towards the balcony.

'Hullo! What's this?' the Colonel cried, fairly surprised that Hubert should actually lay hands on him. 'You're my son, young man, remember. Will you assault your father?'

'*Your* son!' Hubert cried, hardly able to contain himself. '*Your* son!' And he gave an imploring look towards his mother.

Mrs Egremont's face was still flushed with the joy and pride and shame of her confession to her boy. She could not look at that wretched sot who had once been her husband without the profoundest loathing. Should he call Hubert his son? Her whole soul revolted from it. She rose up and faced him with a sudden tremulous resolution. 'He is *not* your son,' she cried, flinging the words defiantly in the old man's face. 'He is the son of ten thousand times a nobler and better man than you are.'

Hubert let his hand fall. 'Now you know the whole truth,' he said calmly, gazing full at Colonel Egremont.

The mother sank back on the sofa in a sudden revulsion of alarm and terror. What had she done? What had she done? What was this she had said in the impulse of a moment? He might publish it to the world; he might shame her; he might ruin her!

But Colonel Egremont drew back, trying to take it all in with that drunken head of his. 'Not my son!' he muttered slowly. 'Ten thousand times a nobler and better man than I am!' Then he burst of a sudden into a loud, harsh laugh. 'So *that's* how

things lie, is it?' he cried, steadying himself by the lintel of the window. 'I see it all now. So you choose to play my game! Well, *tant mieux pour moi!* I had an inkling of this before. I half suspected as much that last winter at Venice!'

Mrs Egremont cowered in her place, now overcome with remorse. The mad impulse of a moment had thrown away everything.

The Colonel let his eyeglass drop, gazed hard at her, and spoke very slowly. 'I think I could put a name to it,' he said at last. And he glanced aside at the photograph.

Mrs Egremont clasped her hands and followed his eyes silently.

'You were always hanging about with him in a gondola,' the husband went on. 'I wonder it didn't occur to me. Ha, ha, ha; what a stroke of luck!' He turned to Hubert. 'I don't know whether you're aware of it or not, young man,' he said; 'but—this exceedingly frank confession disinherits you. If you're not my son, you have no claim to Milworth. By your grandfather's will, and the marriage settlements, it's your mother's for life; but, after her, it goes to the children of the marriage.'

'And I am proud to say,' Hubert answered, 'that I am *not* a child of the marriage.'

'Oh, that's all very fine now,' the Colonel continued, swelling visibly with pride; 'but you've got to remember, the property's entailed on the children of the marriage—with remainder to me, if there *are* no children, to dispose of as I like, without any restriction. Aha, young fellow, there I have you on

the hip! So you'd better just compromise. I'm prepared to negotiate.' He struck a judicial attitude. 'If you can't confine your skeleton to its native cupboard,' he said, with emphasis, 'the next best thing is to dress it up smart, and walk out in the Park with it, arm in arm together, as if you loved it. My proposal is—I come back to Milworth.'

'What he says is true, Hubert,' Mrs Egremont murmured low. 'He can will the estate away from you.'

'It seems strange,' Hubert answered, amazed, 'that a man can't inherit his own mother's property.'

'But in law,' the Colonel cried, catching a murmur of the words, 'an illegitimate son is *not* related to his own mother; and we know from Blackstone that the law is the perection of wisdom!'

Hubert advanced towards him once more. 'This time, you must go,' he said firmly. 'I will have no shilly-shallying. We are not afraid of you. You may do your worst. But recollect this—if you come to England, you shall never receive one penny further.'

He made a threatening move forward. The Colonel, having gained all he wanted for the moment, retreated strategically before him. 'Well, good morning, Julia,' he said, with a deep mock bow. 'We shall meet at Philippi—I mean to say, Milworth.'

And he retired by the balcony with pretended ceremoniousness.

She had given herself away. She had given him Milworth.

CHAPTER XV

AND FEDE?

MRS EGREMONT sank back on the sofa once more, terrified. 'Oh, what have I done?' she cried, clasping her hands. 'What have I done? My poor boy, I have ruined you!'

Hubert smoothed her hair once more with his hand. 'Dear mother,' he answered, 'you have done nothing at all. What is Milworth to me, compared to the relief of knowing after all I am a great man's son—not that besotted creature's? Even if Milworth were lost, I am young, and strong, and a Fellow of my college; I am far better off than nine men out of ten who were with me at Oxford. I could earn enough for myself, and for you and Fede. But Milworth will not go. He cannot take it. My grandfather meant it should be yours and your children's; the silly phrase about "issue of her body, lawfully begotten," is a mere verbal trick and catch-word of the lawyers. Suppose even he tries to prove his point—what evidence has he for the matter but your word? What corroboration, what witnesses? If he goes about talking after so long a lapse of time, nobody will believe him. He may talk till

he dies, and the whole world will laugh at him. But he will not talk. His very insanity will urge him to secretiveness.'

Mrs Egremont wrung her hands. 'Oh, why did I tell him? she cried, in her reaction. 'Why did I tell him?'

'If *you* had not told him, I think *I* should have been forced to tell,' Hubert answered calmly. 'I could not stand his vile insinuation that I was born of such a father as he is. Now I know the truth, that imputation shocks me. Dear mother, you immensely exaggerate the importance of his threats. He could only take action *after* your death, and in case he survived you. But he will *not* survive you. If only you knew the man's state as well as I do! He's more than half delirious mad already, and the slightest extra strain will drive him into an asylum. There he'll die within six months—and nobody will believe him.'

'But meanwhile, meanwhile?' Mrs Egremont said faintly.

'There is *no* meanwhile,' Hubert answered. 'He is on the very verge of a nervous breakdown. If he were to try any large issue, the shock and excitement would kill him instantly. I handled him gently just now, because, to say the truth, I was afraid of killing him. For your sake, I didn't wish him to die before your eyes. His heart is all gone to pieces. You need not be afraid of him. Now, the next thing is, I must explain this to Fedé.'

'Explain this to Fedé?' Mrs Egremont cried, drawing back. 'Oh, Hubert, never!'

'I must break it to her somehow, dearest mother,' Hubert said, leaning over her tenderly. 'But you need not be afraid of her. I feel sure we can trust her. You see, I must account somehow for this change of front. Only an hour ago, I told her I could never, never marry her. Now, after what I have learned—that I am the inheritor of a great man's noble qualities—of course I need no longer hesitate to take her. And I must give *some* reason for my altered attitude.'

Mrs Egremont clung to him. 'But, Hubert,' she cried passionately, overcome with false shame, 'do you think it is necessary? Oh, darling, wait at least. Take time, take time to reflect and consider. Don't act precipitately. How do we know what a young girl like that may choose to think of it? It was different with *you*, darling. For one thing, *you* are my son; for another thing, you are a man; for a third, you are a philosopher, a thinker, a reasoner. But—a pure young girl like that! Suppose, when she hears, she were to hate and despise *me*?'

Hubert kissed away her tears. 'No, mother,' he said, 'no; now is the moment to act. Now is the time to tell her. She is waiting anxiously in your room to know what all this means. She will willingly embrace any explanation that makes it possible for me to marry her. Besides, I feel sure I can depend upon Fede. I have faith in her faithfulness. She is Italian, you know, and she understands passion quite otherwise than our English girls. She is Oxford-bred, again, and she understands reason more than most other women. She will take the

story in its true light; she will, I know—for she has seen your husband!’

He rose to call Fedé. Mrs Egremont still clung to him. ‘But her father must know too,’ she cried; ‘and, oh, Hubert, I could never bear that! Any talk of it would kill me.’

Hubert disentwined her clinging arms gently. ‘He need not know,’ he answered. ‘His point of view is so different. It will be necessary to say no more to her father than that, on second thoughts, I find my difficulties altogether removed, and that no sufficient obstacle prevents my marrying Fedé. That will satisfy the Marchese. It is all he asks of me. The property is his aim. To him, this is merely a matter of business.’ He unwound the clasping arms with difficulty, and moved over to the door. ‘Fedé,’ he called out, opening it, ‘Fedé!’

By the very sound of his voice, the poor girl recognised at once that all was well, and entered the room radiant. ‘Yes, darling,’ she cried, rushing up to him.

‘Fedé,’ Hubert said, in a very slow voice, ‘it is all a mistake, dearest. That wretched creature is *not* my father. I can marry you after all. He is *nothing* to me—nothing.’

Fedé flung herself into his arms, and burst into a little flood of hysterical tears. ‘I told you so,’ she cried. ‘I told you so, dearest. I was sure of it all along. I knew it, Hubert. My name was justified. I had faith in you—faith! My heart against your brain! My instinct against your science!’

She lay in his arms for a moment, indulging her love. Then she withdrew with reluctance, and turned to Mrs Egremont. The two women stood there, trembling, and faced each other. Mrs Egremont's eyes were fixed on the floor. Fede half understood what was next to follow.

She glanced across tenderly at her future husband's mother. 'Then he was an imposter after all,' she said, in her gentle voice. 'It was true what Hubert said. His own father died—years ago—did he not? And this man—' she faltered.

Mrs Egremont raised her eyes and fixed them steadily, with an effort, on the young girl's face. 'Dear Hubert's father died,' she said, hesitating, 'ten years ago—at Florence.'

'And this wretched creature is not your husband?' Fede put in, with a deep flush.

Hubert looked at her earnestly. His face was grave. 'This wretched creature *is* my mother's husband,' he said in plain words, 'but *not* my father. As you are to marry me, darling, it is well you should know it. You had faith in me, Fede: I have faith in you.' And he gazed into her eyes with deep intentness.

Fede drew back, and caught her breath suddenly.

Mrs Egremont fell away in turn, and fixed her gaze on the girl, terrified. 'Oh, Fede,' she cried, 'I have shocked you. Do you understand now? Can you—can you ever again speak to me?'

'Wait!' Hubert cried. 'Let me tell her all. She must know the whole truth.' He pointed to the photograph. '*That* was my father, Fede,' he said,

with deep pride. 'The poet, your father's friend, whom you saw, you told me, as a child, in Florence!'

Still Fede stood blushing. 'My child, my child,' Mrs Egremont cried, unable to endure the suspense any longer, 'if you hate me for it, tell me so!'

Fede turned to her in amaze. 'Could I wish our Hubert to be that other man's son?' she answered, wondering.

Mrs Egremont stretched out wild arms of passionate yearning towards her. 'Then you won't renounce me, Fede?' she cried, gasping.

The girl rushed into her embrace and covered her with hot kisses. 'Mother, dear mother,' she cried, using that sacred name naturally, 'I love you, I love you! How sweet of you to trust me! I loved you from the very first moment I saw you. I love you now ten times better than ever.' And she clung to her in an ecstasy.

'I thanked her for giving me such a father,' Hubert whispered in her ear. 'Do you thank her, Fede?'

Fede clasped her to her breast. 'I thank you, dearest,' she murmured, and laid her hand trustfully on the elder woman's shoulder. 'You have done more for me than that. You have given me Hubert.'

CHAPTER XVI

THE COLONEL'S PLANS

THE Marchese, as Hubert had justly anticipated, asked for his part no awkward questions. He was a man of the world, of the Italian pattern; his tolerance was broad. So long as Hubert announced his intention of marrying Fede, and salved the slight to the honour of the Tornabuoni, he felt little inclined to stir up unpleasant by-gones. He made no comment upon Hubert's *volte-face*. To let sleeping dogs lie was the wisdom of his philosophy. So he merely shrugged his shoulders in his lazy, easy-going, Florentine way, and remarked that, provided only the Property was safe, it was no part of a prudent father's business to inquire by what curious process of logic Hubert had come to accept a situation which one hour before he had declared untenable. 'Droll people these English, Fede,' he said, between the puffs of a cigarette. 'My mother was English; my wife was English; my daughter is English; yet hang me if after fifty years of knowing them, I understand their point of view any better than I did when I was a lad of twenty.' Nevertheless, though he said it not, he had his suspicions of the grounds of action.

So everybody was satisfied—except the Colonel.

Nay, the Colonel himself strolled away from that singular interview with a pleasing sense that things were turning out for him better than he anticipated. 'Even you must feel,' Hubert said to him, as he disappeared through the window, 'that no good purpose can now be served by prolonging any further this painful situation. It is unhappy for us, and humiliating for you—if anything can humiliate you.'

The Colonel slunk off, ruminating on those words. He held his head high, however, as was the wont of his mania. 'Oh, pray don't mention it,' he muttered to himself, in his man-of-the-world way, as he strolled along the balcony. 'Happy to go, I'm sure. Never desire to intrude where the pleasure of my company is not appreciated. Sorry I disturbed the tranquillity of this charming wedding party. They're at it already among themselves, by all that I can see—quarrelling like cats and dogs with one another over the plunder—*my* plunder! Very unprincipled lot. Not displeased to be rid of them. Best intentions in the world, I'm sure; only wanted to give them my paternal blessing—cheap at two hundred, *and* a moderate allowance. But if people refuse to receive the visits of their own husbands and fathers in an amicable spirit, why, hang it all, they can't be astonished at a little unpleasantness. Not my son after all. There's a stroke of luck for you! If he were, Julia could do what she liked about the money. But now I've got a hold over her. I can disinherit her boy. If only I outlive her.' He paused on the stairs and reflected. His feet were unsteady. 'It's this beastly creeping paralysis,' he thought, 'that

spoils all. I've got to outlive Julia. Tough, tough, unhappily! It takes such a lot to kill a woman. Curious what a difference it makes to one, too, when you've a fortune in prospect. Till this minute it never mattered to me whether I died to-morrow or not, so long as I had brandy enough in bottle for to-night to make me decently comfortable. But now, I must live to oust that boy of hers.'

He hobbled downstairs in his uncertain way to a seat in the garden. There, poising himself as best he might, he began to think it out as clearly as he could—without the aid of a brandy and soda. It was very hard work, for he was unused to thinking; and on the rare occasions when he *did* think at all, he assisted nature with aids to thought in the shape of alcohol. To-day, however, he could get no brandy, for he had reached his last sou, and the hotel would not trust him. So he sat and ruminated in a puzzle-headed way, which only resulted at first in a vague phantasmagoria of wild possibilities. As his head cleared, however, and the world came back to him, he began to form plans. 'I shall go to London,' he said to himself, 'if I can get the money. I've not been in London for more than twenty years. Absurd that an officer and a gentleman in *my* position should be debarred from visiting his own club in Pall Mall, for fear of being cut short of money by his wife, who doles him out a pittance as if he were a schoolboy. I've stood it too long. I'll stand it no longer.'

He paused and mused, drawing figures in the gravel with his cane as he thought. 'I shall try her by three roads,' he said to himself once more. 'I'll

instruct my solicitor—have I got a solicitor? Never mind, I'll instruct a solicitor—some solicitor—any solicitor—all rogues alike, solicitors—to enter three separate actions against her. One shall be for Restitution of Conjugal Rights.' He rolled it on his tongue. 'That'll frighten her. One shall be for divorce. That'll touch her reputation. One shall be for declaring this boy of hers illegitimate. That'll threaten the money. I have her there on the horns of a trilemma. Good word, trilemma! Never heard of it before—suppose I invented it. What an inventive genius I have, to be sure! But anyhow, I've got her on one. *If* I fail in the divorce, I score off restitution; if I draw restitution blank, I win on illegitimacy. A very pretty trilemma—heads, I win; tails, Julia loses; and edgeways, the boy has to go from Milworth. I wonder whether a trilemma has three horns? and, if so, whether they go all three abreast; or, like the arms of Sicily and the Isle of Man, which are not arms at all, but really legs, turning round and round as if they were a bicycle wheel, with perpetual motion, and always kicking. I fancy the Isle of Man must be a most unpleasant antagonist. It kicks you circularly. Well, *I'm* just like that. Whichever way I fall, I shall have two good legs firmly fixed on the ground, and one up to kick with!' And he hugged himself at the prospect.

A single petty obstacle alone blocked his way—the temporary tightness of the money market. He was reduced by this time to one or two nickel sous of the Swiss Republic—which is an insufficient provision for a journey to London and three expensive law-suits.

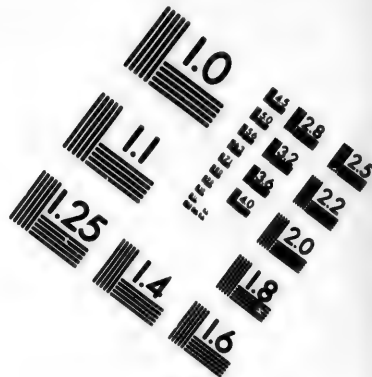
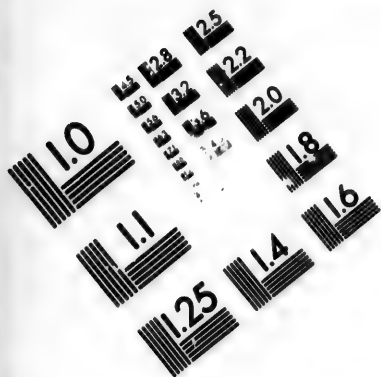
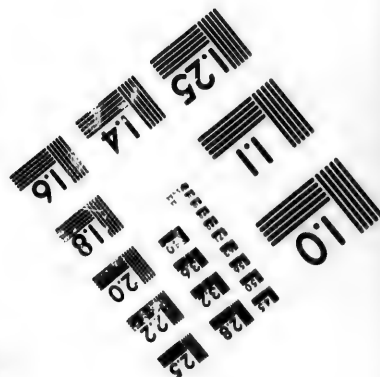
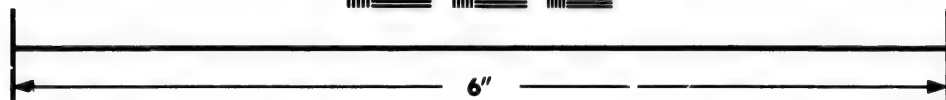
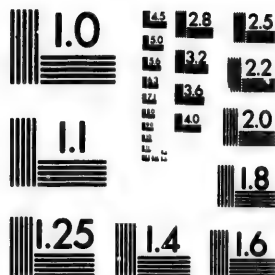


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On this question of ways and means, therefore, the Colonel ruminated long. 'One should always be a gentleman,' he said to himself, reflectively, 'and I've always been a gentleman. How does a gentleman behave when he finds himself, accidentally, hard up at an inn, through the remissness of his family?—what somebody calls their unremitting kindness? Why, he explains to the landlord, and borrows a trifling sum for current expenses. *I'll* explain to the landlord. And I'll borrow a trifling sum—that is to say, if he'll lend it me.'

He rose from the garden seat and moved towards the steps. 'Concierge!' he called out with ridiculous dignity.

'Monsieur?' the concierge said, raising his head without quitting his box for the shabby visitor.

'I desire to speak with the proprietor,' Colonel Egremont went on, with aristocratic *hauteur*.

'Certainly, sir,' the concierge answered, and went in search of him.

The proprietor came out with that singular mixture of deference and rudeness which proprietors of hotels keep specially laid on for undesirable guests. 'Monsieur?' he said blandly.

The Colonel drew himself up, and played his best card first. 'I'm a disreputable old party for a hotel like this,' he observed insinuatingly. '*A vaurien. A bümmeln.* Is it not so, Herr Proprietor?'

The proprietor bowed. '*Monsieur plaisante,*' he murmured, rubbing his hands dubiously.

'Not at all,' the Colonel replied, glancing down at his shabby coat. 'Honour bright, I mean it. I'm

no recommendation, no recommendation at all to the place, and the other guests hate me.'

The proprietor nodded, unwilling to acquiesce in this too true statement, and, in his own pet phrase, awaited developments.

'It would pay you to get rid of me,' the Colonel continued, with an insinuating smile. 'I have been here two days; I have paid *à la carte* beforehand; and I owe no man anything. But my cash in hand is reduced to that—I assure you, to that.' He opened his closed palm and displayed the two paltry little shining nickels. 'A ridiculous sum for a man who has held her Britannic Majesty's commission,' he said; 'but true nevertheless. Inadequate, isn't it?'

The Colonel gazed at them comically. The proprietor bowed again. 'And you suggest?' he said with ironical politeness.

The Colonel resumed his grandiloquent manner. 'I desire,' he went on, 'to return at once to Lugano and Florence. I have friends in each town—friends, important friends—and money. I came here expecting to receive some little remittance from my family, who are in Number Twenty. But my family are recalcitrant. You have a wife yourself, *Monsieur le propriétaire*; you know that sex; you can doubtless sympathise with me.' He drew out a card and handed it with mysterious solemnity to the landlord. 'Colonel Walter Egremont, late Royal Engineers,' he said, reading it aloud; 'husband of the lady who is now in Number Twenty.'

The landlord examined it. 'I see,' he observed

cautiously. 'One must not interfere between guests and their families. That induces complications.'

'And what I want,' the Colonel continued, 'is to raise a small loan—a merely nominal loan, say a couple of louis—which would enable me to get back from Goeschenen by the Gotthard.'

The landlord was a man who did nothing precipitately. 'I will consider it,' he answered, with true Swiss prudence.

And he considered. As the result of his consideration, it occurred to him to take the card to Sir Emilius, who by this time had learned, very much to his surprise, that Hubert had thought better of his intention of dropping Fede, and was prepared to carry out his original programme of marrying her. Sir Emilius scanned the card close. 'I'll go and see him,' he said slowly, with his hand on his chin. 'I can do more with him, I think, than either my sister or my nephew.'

It was perfectly true. Sir Emilius's quiet professional manner always frightened the Colonel. The great doctor boarded his brother-in-law at once as he would have boarded any other incipient lunatic. 'Now, Egremont,' he said firmly, laying one hand on his shoulder, and holding up a monitory forefinger of the other, 'the landlord tells me you've tried to borrow money. You know very well if you borrow it from him, you can never repay him. I've told him as much, and warned him against lending it to you. As for Hubert and Julia, they have made their minds up never to let you have another penny. You've brought that on yourself, by coming here against

orders and your own written agreement. And you've caused no end of bother, and trouble as well, in an innocent family, whose only crime is the fact that it happens to have *you* for a husband and father. I approve of their decision. But for myself, as I desire to get rid of you at once, I'm prepared to lend you a small sum—five pounds—to clear out with immediately, provided you engage to go straight back to Lugano to-day, and show your face here no longer. Do you understand, and do you promise?’

He held an English five-pound note between finger and thumb, and extended it tentatively. The sight of so much money was tempting indeed to a thirsty man. It represented some dozens of brandy, and meant, among other things, a drink immediately. Colonel Egremont did not hesitate. Visions of cognac and a syphon of soda floated before his eyes. His finance and his diplomacy were both from hand to mouth. He would accept anything, and promise anything, for a momentary advance. One can always lie and break one's word afterwards. His fingers closed over the crisp paper eagerly. ‘I'll clear out at once, Rawson,’ he answered, ‘as soon as I've had a drink.’ But he had no more intention of returning to Lugano than of returning the money.

He fortified himself for the way with a strong glass or two of brandy. Then, certain that nothing more was to be obtained from his wife or Hubert for the present, he set off on foot in the direction of Meyringen, carrying, as usual, his whole wardrobe with him. But he only walked as far as the very next village. There he ordered a post-cart to Lucerne

with the air of a duke, and lolled back in it luxuriously, like a born Bashaw. For nobody could accuse Colonel Egremont of not spending his money royally when he got it. He wasted it while it lasted, and then begged or borrowed with a mind at ease till the arrival of his next remittance.

He slept well at the Schweitzerhof: why try a worse house? It was his intention to proceed next day to England.

But he would do nothing rash. He would keep his own counsel. As Hubert anticipated, he had reached the secretive stage of insanity. Arrived in London, he would consult a solicitor; till then, not one word would he say to anyone. Better lock up the great secret in his own safe breast, till he could trumpet it forth in court—'This woman was unfaithful.' He hugged himself at the prospect of that humiliating disclosure. If Julia got wind of his intention too soon, she might manage to evade him. But he would make his case sure, and then burst upon her like a thunderbolt. Ha, ha, ha, what a triumph! That bastard should never be the heir of Milworth!

He whistled it to himself as he drove and lolled. Bastard! bastard! bastard! bastard!

He lingered on the word. But nature's bastards, as Hubert knew well, are the children of loveless and ill-assorted unions.

CHAPTER XVII

AT MILWORTH MANOR

WHILE the hoary old reprobate was maturing his plans, Hubert and his bride were pursuing theirs quietly. Early in November, the Marchese and Fede sat in Mrs Egremont's comfortable drawing-room at Milworth Manor, Devonshire.

'There is no reason,' Hubert had said in Switzerland, 'why Fede and I should not be married immediately.'

As for the Marchese, he entirely reciprocated that view. He was quite convinced that, in his own parlance, Fede had got hold of 'a good thing' in England. The young man was eligible. But, with a person so apparently capricious and fanciful as Hubert, the Italian preferred to see everything signed, sealed and delivered outright with full legal formalities. 'Marry them out of hand,' was his plan for the young people. The wedding, it was arranged, should take place (as Cecco had wisely surmised) at the end of November in London. Meanwhile, the Marchese and Fede were to visit Mrs Egremont for a fortnight at her home in Devonshire.

The Marchese was by no means disappointed in the Property. A Georgian house in a big domain exactly suited him. He stood at the bay window of

the square brick mansion, looking down upon the valley of the little stream that ran in esses below, admiring the rich green pastures, dotted with ruddled sheep, and the wedge-shaped glen that opened through red cliffs to the purple sea of the South Hams of Devon.

'Isn't it lovely, papa,' Fede exclaimed, touching his arm—'this beautiful park, and those glorious old oak-trees?'

The Marchese took it all in with a comprehensive glance. 'Excellent grass land, my dear,' he answered, 'and most valuable timber!'

'And these sweet hills and dales!' Fede cried once more. 'And the darling fallow-deer huddled together on the ground under the big horse-chestnuts; and the river that flows in such a curve at the bottom; and the gardens and the lawn! Oh, Hubert, it's lovely!'

Hubert beamed his joy. 'I'm so glad you like it,' he said, smiling. 'I was afraid, after Italy—'

Fede cut him short. 'Oh, no,' she answered, 'Italy's a picture-gallery; but England's a garden.'

'The river bounds your estate, I suppose, Mrs Egremont?' the Marchese observed, with an underlying note of interrogation in his voice which meant inquiry as to the exact extent of the Property.

'Oh, no,' Mrs Egremont said, pointing vaguely with one hand toward the hills of the horizon, 'we go beyond it, Marchese—to the top of the ridge where you see the red ploughed fields there.'

'So?' the Marchese repeated. His respect for the family into which Fede was marrying rose visibly each moment. 'And in the other direction?'

'In the other direction,' Hubert said, 'we go up to the summit of the down that you came over from the station.'

'Indeed!' the Marchese answered. 'A very handsome Property. Fede, my dear, you'll have room to walk about in, I fancy.'

'Everything's delicious.' Fede said, enchanted; 'the house and grounds, and the dear old red church, and the rookery with the elms, and the winding river. Did you ever see a house so pretty as this, papa? I don't mean outside—though even outside the creepers make it all so snug and cosy—but this charming hall and this delightful, comfortable English drawing-room?'

'My dear,' the Marchese interposed, 'I see in this taste of yours the finger of Providence. It's lucky you're going to marry an Englishman, for I'm afraid you're as English and as insular as any of them.'

'Oh, no,' Fede cried, 'you mustn't say that, papa! I love England, and I love Hubert, and I love you, dear mother, and I love this beautiful place, and I love Oxford; but I won't forego my birthright of having been born a Florentine. I'm proud of Florence, and proud of Italy; I shall never give up my Italian ancestry. It's something, after all, to be by descent a Tornabuoni!'

'And I love Italy, Fede,' Hubert answered, 'and I love an Italian girl. I don't think I could have loved her *quite* so well if she weren't—well, just what she is, Fede.'

Fede quieted his too demonstrative affection with a look. 'Now, papa,' she said, 'you haven't half ad-

mired the drawing-room enough. This exquisite Morris paper, and the old brocade curtains, and the Chippendale chairs—are they heirlooms, dear mother?’

Mrs Egremont smiled. ‘My ancestors have been here for ten generations, Fede,’ she answered, ‘and almost everything in the house has descended from them—especially the silver and the old oak furniture.’

The Marchese surveyed it all with amused approbation. ‘And as clean as a new pin,’ he interposed—‘in spite of its age! It’s only in England one ever gets that delightfully incongruous juxtaposition of antiquity and cleanliness. ’Tis your national passion—next after religious and moral complacency. Most of your people imagine, I believe, that “Cleanliness is next to godliness” comes out of the Bible. They take their own proverb for a text of Scripture.’ He was glancing at the bookshelf, where a certain number of poets rubbed shoulders with moral and religious treatises. ‘A wonderful nation!’ he went on, musing. ‘*The Christian Year*; *The Book of Job*—Bradley! In the field of commercial enterprise, nothing succeeds like soap. In literature, the staple industry of your principal writers is the production of tracts. Your greatest artists combine both tastes, and paint alternately Rebekah at the Well and advertisements for Pears. You are a great people! For mixed cleanliness and godliness, there is nobody to touch you!’

The Marchese was remarkable himself for the scrupulous personal neatness of the Italian gentleman, and his delicate white nails and irreproachable shirt-cuffs gave him a right to criticise. Hubert

smiled at his strictures ; but Sir Emilius, whose distinguishing characteristics were British patriotism and unwavering devotion to the creed of the tub, intervened with an objection. 'Look at our sanitation, though, Marchese,' he cried. 'The decrease in our death-rate through judicious drainage ! Whereas at Naples—'

The Marchese shrugged his shoulders. 'At Naples,' he said, 'they produce opera and cholera ; at Florence, Michael Angelo, typhoid, and Dante. I grant you all you ask. You are the cleanest and the best-drained nation in Europe. I only suggest that main drainage is not everything : to be merely clean does not sum up in itself the whole gospel of perfection.'

Sir Emilius was dumbfounded. When a foreigner found anything to criticise in England, he set it down at once to envenomed envy.

Mrs Egremont interposed to save Sir Emilius's wounded feelings. 'Look at my Botticelli, Marchese,' she said ; 'that charming Madonna ! It's a sweet thing, isn't it ? You see, we are not wholly given over to Rebekahs !'

The Marchese scanned it attentively. 'A school piece, I should say,' he answered after a pause ; for he was a bit of a connoisseur : '*not* a genuine work of the master.' He had more than one specimen of his great countryman's handicraft on his own walls in Florence.

'I *bought* it as a Botticelli,' Sir Emilius said warmly, 'and gave it to my sister. I *believe* it's genuine. I know I paid a genuine price for it.'

Pictures, unfortunately, were the one object on

earth for which the Marchese did not accept a money value as ultimate. 'Botticelli *as* imported, perhaps,' he replied, with a smile and a doubtful accent. 'The Botticelli of commerce. *Not* the sort of article we consume in Florence.'

'Why shouldn't we go out for a stroll in the grounds, Hubert?' Fede put in, apprehensive. 'The morning's so lovely.'

'And yet, I'm sorry you should see Milworth first in November fogs,' Hubert answered, with a darted glance. 'It looks so different, you know, when the leaves are on the oaks and the rhododendrons in the shrubbery are one blaze of crimson.'

'If it's so lovely now,' Fede replied, 'I don't know what it can be in the green and purple of summer. But, indeed, could it be lovelier than the dappled gold of the autumn tints on the beeches, and the blood-red of the maple trees? And those mists over the river, how mysterious they are; how soft! I love the elusiveness of English outlines.'

'Then run and put your hat on, dear,' Mrs Egremont said, looking at her affectionately. 'We'll take you round the place and show you where all the wild flowers grow in spring. Not even the banks of the Arno in May are lovelier, Fede, than our Milworth woods when the bluebells and primroses carpet the slopes, or when the foxgloves marshall their ranks in great regiments in August.'

The Marchese lingered near the door as if conscious that reparation was due to Sir Emilius. 'It's a most delightful place,' he said; 'capital estate, I can see, with good fishing and shooting. After all

your English country houses are the cosiest and best-supplied villas in any part of Europe.'

'Eh?' Sir Emilius said hastily, wondering if he had caught so obvious a platitude. 'Why, of course they are, Marchese. For show, the Continent's all very well in it's way; but for solid comfort, it's generally admitted, there's nothing like England.'

He said it with such British certitude of conviction that the Marchese hardly ventured on the risky repartee. 'If only the cooks knew anything of cookery!' For Sir Emilius was one of those true-born Britons who divide the world into two antithetical halves—England and Abroad; believing firmly that the denizens of Abroad, who are called Foreigners, must themselves be conscious of their own vast inferiority to the English people, and must spend their time in deploring the Providence which did not permit them to be born Englishmen. The highest compliment he could pay to any Continental was to say, with warmth, that he was just like an Englishman.

'Cookery,' Sir Emilius repeated, taken aback. 'Why, where in Europe can you get a joint of meat such as you get in England?'

'A joint of meat?' the Marchese mused to himself. 'Ay, that's just it: a joint of meat! Your national fetish! Precisely my contention.'

'And our London dinner-parties,' Sir Emilius went on, growing warmer as he proceeded. 'The best in the world. What have you to say about our London dinner-parties?'

'Exhibitions of food,' the Marchese replied in a

conciliatory tone. 'And as such, no doubt, admirable. Material evidences of your national prosperity. The finished form of your famous cattle shows. One shows the raw product, the other the manufactured article. But for cookery, my dear Sir Emilius'—he expanded his palms and raised his shoulders—'excuse my incredulity.'

Fede led him away gently to avoid further complications. The Italian and the Englishman were as oil and vinegar.

'Remarkable the blindness of these Foreigners,' Sir Emilius observed, as the door closed behind them. 'Brought up on macaroni, sour wine and *frittura*, they don't understand a good piece of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding when they see it! Most singular, really!' And he strolled out into the hall for his hat and umbrella—the latter a talisman which he carried through life with religious exactitude, in no matter what climate.

Hubert and Mrs Egremont were left alone, awaiting their guests' return to go out into the park. Just at that moment a servant entered with a card, which he passed to his mistress. Mrs Egremont took it carelessly from the salver, hardly darting a glance at it. 'Who brought it, Reece?' she asked. 'Very early to call.' Then the name caught her eye. She changed colour at once. But she did not betray herself before the servant. She passed it on to Hubert. Her son glanced at it, and held his breath. 'Colonel Walter Egremont.' So he had kept his word! He had followed them to Milworth!

Hubert was equal to the occasion. Above all

things, the Tornabuoni must not know of this visit. The Colonel's apparition in Switzerland had alarmed Fede not a little; if she knew he was at Milworth, it would certainly terrify her.

'Show the gentleman into the library, Reece,' he said, with the utmost calmness. 'I will come there to see him.'

The man withdrew to do as he was bid. Mrs Egremont glanced at Hubert with a face of agony. 'Oh, what shall we do?' she cried. 'What shall we do? It is *my* fault, Hubert. I blurted it all out! And now he has followed us, and he will tell all, and disinherit you.'

Hubert rose from his chair, walked slowly across to her, and smoothed her hair with his hand in the gentlest manner. A tinge of grey in those beautiful brown locks made them only prettier and more pathetic. 'Dearest mother,' he said, 'you need not be afraid. I will take him in hand. He shall not trouble you. Stop here and show Fede and her father round the grounds. Make some excuse for me. I will see him and get rid of him.'

CHAPTER XVIII

PRIVATE INQUIRY

ANYBODY who had seen Colonel Egremont in the library at Milworth that morning would hardly have recognised him as the same person who had walked across, in half-ragged clothes, from Goeschenen Station to the Black Eagle in the Rothenthal a few weeks previously. He was dressed in a brand-new tourist tweed suit, a soft felt hat, a clean white shirt, and a collar and cuffs as immaculate as the Marchese's. Dress makes a marvellous difference, even to such a degraded sot as the Colonel; a week or two in England, a temporary renewal of the disused habit of washing himself daily, and, above all, the consciousness that he was almost the master of Milworth Manor, had wrought an incredible change in the shabby old drunkard. Other circumstances collaborated. Sir Emilius's five pounds had brought the Colonel safely to London. There, a shady solicitor in low water had been induced, by tempting promises, to take up his case, while a still shadier money-lender (relying on the chance that the wife would pay) had backed it at an extravagant rate of interest for a few pounds of ready money. With the capital thus obtained, the Colonel had proceeded

to rig himself out in a suit of clothes fit for a gentleman; and if you had met him in Bond Street in a shiny silk hat and a long black frock coat the day before, you might almost have taken him at first sight for what he had once been—an officer and a gentleman.

Colonel Egremont had not come down to Milworth alone. He brought his suite along with him. As he sat in the library awaiting Hubert's arrival, he turned to the solemn-looking young man in a respectable black suit who had accompanied him from London. 'Now remember, Fletcher,' he said, in his most impressive voice, gazing at him through the eyeglass, 'you come as my valet. Every gentleman of position must have a valet. And I'm not going to stand any damned nonsense in this house, I can tell you. Why doesn't the young jackanapes hurry up? Eh? eh? Is this the sort of way to treat a person who has borne Her Majesty's commission?'

The private detective whom he addressed as Fletcher looked at his employer suspiciously. Suspicion is part of the legitimate stock-in-trade of a private detective. It is the armour of the profession. And this particular client was a peculiarly shady one. In the first place, he had not deigned to confide to his *employé* the nature of the errand upon which he was coming. He merely remarked, with airy generality, that he was going down to Devonshire, and wished to watch a house where his wife was living. 'Divorce?' the private detective suggested gently. But the Colonel shook his head

with austere disapprobation. 'What's that to you, young fellow?' he said. 'You mind your own business.' He had the exaggerated secretiveness of the semi-insane, the private detective fancied; indeed, even to his lawyer and his money-lender he had only confided so much of his suspicions as would enable him to raise the sinews of war for this important expedition. The detective at first more than half suspected some attempt at burglary, and as it is the first duty of every intelligent private inquiry agent to look after Number One, he was prepared to keep a close watch of his own upon the very man who was paying him to keep a close watch upon others. Besides, the employer was clearly more than half mad, so Fletcher also kept an eye upon him as a possible lunatic. Anyhow, there was something to be got out of the job. His chief business was, to draw his salary and to see that his chief got him into no serious trouble.

Hubert did not hurry to go into the library. It was not his policy to flatter Colonel Egremont's idea of his own importance, or to show such signs of fear as might perhaps be implied by too hasty an entrance, so he loitered purposely. The Colonel fumed and fretted. 'Disgraceful, Fletcher, disgraceful!' he said, pacing up and down with uncertain steps, like one who feels his legs after a casual tumble. 'I'm the master of this house—the lord of Milworth Manor—and yet, I'm to give way to a whipper-snapper of a boy, who has no more right in the place than you—nor half as much, if it comes to that, for I have brought you here—and he keeps

me waiting his pleasure in this abominable fashion. A conceited upstart! A blithering idiot! A cad of an interloper! But *I* shall make him smart for it.'

'Perhaps he's out,' Fletcher suggested calmly.

'No, he isn't,' the Colonel answered, 'for I heard his voice in the drawing-room as we came in. You see, I'm master here, and I know the place well. This room is the library; then outside there's the entrance hall, where we passed; and behind it, the drawing-room. To the right my wife's boudoir; to the left the billiard-room.' He rose and walked about, examining the pictures and furniture. 'Very little altered either,' he went on, gazing around. 'The same old bookcases, the same old water-colours, the same old sermons in dusty calf, the same old view from the big front window. No flies on that view, Fletcher. One of the best in Devonshire. Time writes no wrinkles on its azure brow.' He assumed his grandiose air. 'Devilish fine house,' he went on. 'Always *was* a fine house. And my wife has just modernised and aestheticised it a trifle.'

'Good portrait, the young man in uniform,' Fletcher observed, glancing up at it.

'Good portrait? You think so?' the Colonel answered, gazing at it affectionately. 'Well, it was considered very like at the time it was taken. It's one of Watts's earliest. I sat for that—let me see—it must be close on thirty years ago.'

'*You* sat for it?' the detective said incredulously, glancing from one to the other. 'Why, that can't

be you.' He had graver doubts than ever of his employer's sanity.

'It is, though,' the Colonel replied, holding his head on one side and admiring it unaffectedly. 'I was an innocent young chap then, wasn't I, eh? before I blossomed out into the hoary old reprobate. I quite agree with you, I *do* look a young milk-sop! We know what we are, as Ophelia says, but we know not what we may be. Hang it all, when I sat for that portrait, Fletcher, to give my wife before I married her, I didn't think I should ever be kept waiting by a whipper-snapper of a saw-bones in my own house till he found it convenient to himself to come to me. Disgraceful, I call it, to a retired officer! If the fellow don't make haste, I'll go and drag him.'

'I wouldn't if I were you,' the private inquirer put in. 'Legal methods are safest. 'Tis the great First Principle of private inquiry.'

'Legal methods!' the Colonel responded, in his largest style, swelling visibly before his eyes like bread when it rises. 'Why, who's got a legal right to be here if it isn't me, I should like to know? Eh, eh? What do you make of it? This house is mine—and the park—and the manor.' He waved his hands about and moved over to the window. 'Why, damn it all, there's the whipper-snapper,' he cried, looking out at Hubert—'over there by the clump of evergreens, with that Italian girl of his. In *my* grounds, too! By George, what insolence!'

He opened the French window slightly, so that he could catch what was passing. Hubert was speaking

rather low. 'I must go in for a while, dear,' he said. 'Somebody wants to see me. But mother will show you round the garden and grounds, and I'll come out again as soon as I can and meet you.'

'Will you?' the Colonel ejaculated in an undertone. 'Oh, will you really! Not if I know it, my young friend. Once I catch you, I keep you.'

He spoke in a thick but excited voice, which the detective didn't quite like. It suggested an impartial mixture of drink and madness.

'It's sweet everywhere here,' Fede answered. 'Make haste and come back to me. I *want* you, Hubert. I want to see it all with you.'

'And in a few weeks it will be yours, Fede,' the young man continued, with a lover's glance at her. 'You will come back to it as its mistress.'

And he moved away rapidly.

'Oh, will she?' the Colonel murmured. 'About that, Mr Whipper-Snapper, there may be two opinions. *I'm* master in this house, and I'm not at present in need of a lady assistant. Though, to be sure, the young woman would suit me admirably.'

As he spoke, the door opened, and Hubert entered.

'Well?' he said slowly, surveying the Colonel up and down, with a side-glance at the detective. 'You have ventured to come here?'

Colonel Egremont blustered a little, though he felt vaguely uncomfortable. 'Yes,' he answered; 'here I am, and here I mean to remain. Restitution of Conjugal Rights is my game. That's just what they call it. I've come home as the master of Milworth Manor.'

'I beg your pardon,' Hubert answered, with chilly politeness, 'you have done nothing of the kind. This is my mother's house—neither yours nor mine—and without her permission you shall *not* remain in it.'

He approached him, threateningly. The Colonel drew back a step. 'Take care,' he said, turning an appealing glance towards Fletcher. 'I have brought my servant with me as my witness, and for my personal protection.'

Hubert eyed the man sternly. 'Colonel Egremont,' he said, with calm disdain, 'I shall not permit this intrusion. If you think you have any claim to urge against my mother, you can urge it by legal means. I refer you to her solicitor. But if you attempt to remain here, against her will, I shall call the servants to eject you forcibly.' He moved over towards the bell and placed one finger on the electric knob. 'Will you go?' he asked, in a very quiet voice. 'Or must I ring for them to remove you?'

The Colonel, taken aback, reflected to himself that, under these painful circumstances, a seeming compliance was best for all parties. He had calculated, indeed, on terrifying his wife by the mere fact of his presence at Milworth Manor. This cool reception took him completely by surprise. 'Oh, I'll go,' he answered, though with some faint undertone still of his accustomed bluff. 'Go? certainly! By all means! A gentleman never obtrudes himself where his society isn't wanted. You wish to hear from my solicitor—very natural course—then from my solicitor you shall hear—and shortly, shortly.'

He retreated as he spoke, one step at a time, and let his eyeglass drop ; while Hubert followed him up in a threatening attitude. He moved on to the door, Fletcher bringing up the rear. In the hall, Hubert happened to come across a servant. 'Reece,' he said, in his quietest voice, without a trace of flurry, 'will you accompany this gentleman all the way to the gate—see him safely out—and tell them at the lodge not to let him come in again? If he attempts to re-enter, let them send for the police. He is to leave the grounds. You understand my instructions?'

Reece bowed with the inflexibly unperturbed face of the well-trained man-servant. 'Yes, sir ; certainly, sir,' he answered, with promptitude. If the Colonel had been a dog, Reece could not have received the order with more perfect composure.

Colonel Egremont was taken aback. 'Oh, for the matter of that, I go,' he said jauntily, putting on his soft felt hat, and assuming an ostentatiously nonchalant air, as though he rather enjoyed this mode of ejection. 'I dislike unpleasantness. Never was a person for creating scenes. I prefer to efface myself. But I wish you to understand, young man'—he addressed the servant—'that I'm the master of this house ; the lord of the Manor of Milworth : and when I come again, I expect you to obey me. Do you understand?' He tapped his chest. 'I'm your master, sir—your master !'

'Yes, sir ; certainly, sir,' Reece replied, with the same stolid indifference. It was no part of his duty to be rude to the intruder.

'Then why do you take me to the gate?' the Colonel exclaimed, as Hubert stood at the door to watch him retreat from it.

'Because them's my orders,' Reece said, in the same official tone. 'You may be my master—but I'm engaged by Mrs Egremont.'

'And I'm her husband, fellow,' the Colonel cried, trying to stop, turn round, and face him.

Reece drove the obnoxious visitor before him down the avenue as he would have driven a cow or a flock of sheep. 'Yes, sir; so I hear, sir,' he assented, never pausing for a moment. 'And young Mr Egremont's orders is to see Mrs Egremont's husband safe off the premises; and I'm obeying them, sir; beg your pardon.'

There was no withstanding this stolid unimpressible devotion to duty. If the last day had intervened, Reece would still have continued ejecting the Colonel, till *force majeure* compelled him to desist. The Colonel recognised that fact, and moved slowly before him. Coin of the realm interposed in vain. The Colonel walked on. An altercation with a servant?—impossible, he reflected. His gait was even more shaky now than it had been in Switzerland. He shuffled as he walked, scarcely lifting each foot half an inch above the ground, and planting it again in a curious uncertain groping fashion. He reeled at times like an over-driven ox. But he continued, uncomplaining, his head high in the air, his mien overbearing.

Reece accompanied him to the gate, and saw them duly out. 'Good morning, sir; beg your pardon, sir,'

he said, with perfect politeness. He was a gentleman's servant. That summed up the whole of his individuality. Then he turned, like the perfect machine that he was, to give his message at the lodge to the gardener's wife who kept it. 'If these gentlemen try to come back,' he said, with stolid precision, 'you're to bar them out, Mrs Michelmores. Them's Mr Hubert's orders.'

Hubert meanwhile had rejoined his mother. She was trembling with anxiety. 'Well, what have you done?' she whispered.

Hubert laid one hand on her shoulder with an affectionate gesture. 'Sent him off,' he answered, low. 'He's madder and more ill, I think, than ever. He won't come back, I believe. He's just at the last gasp, and I've referred him to our lawyer.' He turned to his future wife. 'There, Fede,' he added aloud, 'did you ever see anything prettier and wilder in its way than that bed of yellow flags by the bridge and the river?'

CHAPTER XIX

VICTORY!

OUTSIDE the gate, Colonel Egremont called a halt to consider the situation. Though full of self-importance still, he was taken by surprise, and even a trifle humiliated. This summary ejection entirely upset his preconceived ideas. He had expected consternation; he found quiet resolve. That young whipper-snapper had shown no disposition to parley with him. The Colonel had come down to his wife's estate in a heroic not to say thrasonic mood, regarding himself already as the master of Milworth; and he had been ignominiously expelled, like a driven dog, by a single man-servant. He glanced askance at Fletcher. 'Rum job,' he mused tentatively.

'Very rum job,' the detective assented, with a distinctive flavour of distrust towards his employer.

Colonel Egremont paused, and drew a small leather-covered flask from his pocket. He seated himself with difficulty on a fence close by. He had some trouble to balance himself, and even when he succeeded, his equilibrium was most unstable. 'I'm run down, Fletcher,' he said, with a glance at the flask. 'Want winding up a bit. And here's the watch-key!' He poured himself out a small glass of brandy, and drank it off in meditative abstraction.

'What's the next move?' the detective asked. This odd situation piqued his curiosity.

Colonel Egremont passed him the glass with a polite gesture of invitation. 'Have a wind-up?' he asked. 'What; no? Blue ribbon? I hope not. Ah, don't want a drink just now? Then we'll proceed to business.'

He steadied himself on the fence with considerable difficulty. Turning round towards his satellite, he began again slowly. 'Fletcher,' he inquired, in an impressive voice, 'do you know anything about divorce?'

The detective smiled a contemptuous smile. 'Do I know anything about it?' he repeated, with sarcastic emphasis. 'Do I know my own business? Divorce is bread and butter to me—board, lodging and washing. Why, I've supported a wife and family on divorce—four strapping little youngsters, as fine as they make 'em.'

'Well, wherever there's an intrigue—' the Colonel began, in a tentative voice.

'In *my* experience,' Fletcher broke in, 'there is *always* an intrigue.' And he spoke with confidence.

'There will probably be letters,' the Colonel went on, without noticing the interruption.

'In *my* experience,' the private inquirer repeated pointedly, 'there are *always* letters.'

Colonel Egremont hesitated. With the natural secretiveness of the half-insane, he did not wish to blurt out more of his case than necessary. 'But if an intrigue happened long since,' he said; 'many years ago, for instance—say twenty or more—would the letters be kept, or would the possessor burn them?'

The detective answered with the certainty given by

long habituation to the ways of human nature. 'A man lets 'em lie about, or loses 'em, or burns 'em; a woman keeps 'em.'

'*Always* keeps them, Fletcher?

'Invariably keeps 'em.'

'For twenty-four years?'

'For the term of her natural life. Till she dies, or somebody else gets 'em.'

The Colonel let himself down with difficulty from his perch. His control of his limbs was evidently precarious. He braced himself up for a supreme effort. 'Then come along,' he said shortly. 'I'm going for those letters!'

The detective paused and hung back. 'To the house again?' he inquired, with apparent unwillingness.

'*Not* by the front way,' Colonel Egremont answered. 'I shall take another. Remember, I'm master here, Fletcher; I know the estate and all the ways of it. We'll stroll in by the shrubbery and the library window, without passing the lodge, or ringing the bell, or trying the front door. There's a side path yonder. Why, man, I could find the road anywhere about here in the dark. It's the same as twenty years ago, only just grown up a bit.'

Fletcher drew back once more. 'I don't quite like the look of it,' he said; 'it's too near a shave of burglary.'

'Now, you look here, young man,' the Colonel broke out, in his most paternal tone; 'there's nothing to be afraid of. I'm master here, and I mean to be respected. I'm the lady's husband, and you saw they admitted it. A man may visit his own wife's house, mayn't he? If he can't, what's the law for, and re-

stitution of conjugal rights, I ask you? I don't want you to help me. I don't ask you to come in. I only ask you to watch outside and let me know if anybody else is coming. When they turn up, you can cough; and I'll promise to see you safely through with it.'

'What I want to know,' the detective said doggedly, 'is, what's this job? Is it divorce or isn't it? Do you suspect your wife, or do you want her money?'

The Colonel temporised. 'I suspect my wife,' he answered,—'of hopeless respectability. Though, of course, when a man's been away from home for twenty-four years, why, hang it all, *something's* likely to have happened in the interval, isn't it?'

'Oh, if *that's* your game,' Fletcher answered, 'that's all right. The usual line of business. But why didn't you say so?'

'Because,' the Colonel answered with dignity, 'I'm the master of this house, and I'm not going to be questioned by anybody with impunity.' As he said it, he drew himself up and strutted.

'Going mad!' the detective thought to himself. 'I've seen them that way before. But anyhow, I'm down here, and I'd better help him through with it. It may be the regular private inquiry business, who knows? If he pays me, well and good; if he goes mad, I can take the other side, and get it out of the family in the end for watching him. I can see there ain't much love lost between 'em, anyhow.'

They put themselves in motion again. The Colonel walked round by the back of the shrubbery, along the high road, not skulking as he went, but more erect than usual. He strutted as he walked, though with

his feet dragging painfully and at times almost tripping him. When they had come abreast of the house, under the high brick wall, he opened a small side-gate with an air of authority. His mien was pompous. The detective followed him. They went by a mossy path, damp and matted underfoot, and completely over-arched by horse-chestnut and lilac bushes. Still walking very erect, the Colonel approached the library window, which he had left half-open when they quitted it an hour before. He stalked in with some remnant of a military tread, in spite of his paralysis. Still Fletcher followed him. The Colonel's manner grew more grandiose at each step; he entered the drawing-room, and looked haughtily about him. Then he drew out his flask again.

'What are you up to?' the detective asked, in a warning voice.

'Only just going to oil the machinery a bit,' Colonel Egremont replied with a wink; and he proceeded to oil it: after which, he reflected that winking was undignified, and drew himself up still more stiffly than ever.

The detective looked alarmed. 'Well, the sooner you get to work now,' he said, 'the better. If it's letters you want, *do* you know where to find them?'

'Yes,' the Colonel mused slowly, like one talking in his sleep. 'In my wife's boudoir. There was an escritoire there—if they haven't modernised and aestheticised it out of existence—in which she used always to keep her most private correspondence. It may be there still; . . . and again it may not.'

He doddered as he talked, but his smile was

a smile of ineffable cunning. He mooned towards the door. 'If anyone comes,' he said, turning round, 'cough! *I'll* manage everything.'

'Look here,' Fletcher said again, 'are you going to open this escritoire, or are you not? For if you do, that's burglary.'

The Colonel waved his hand. 'I tell you,' he answered, with some impatience, 'I'm well within my rights. I'm master in this house, and I can do what I like in it. I shall find that woman out. Yes, I'm going to open it.'

'Well, have you anything to open it with, then?' the cautious detective inquired, more practically. He spoke in a whisper.

Colonel Egremont produced a small skeleton key. 'I have this,' he answered.

'Good!' the detective replied, with a satisfied nod. 'Not such a fool as he looks! D. T., no doubt: but still the lady may have letters for all that.—Well, you'd better make haste. I don't half like the hang of it.'

The Colonel nodded and disappeared. Fletcher gazed after him with a dubious glance. 'He's the oddest client I ever had,' he murmured to himself. 'I don't know what to think of him. If he's a burglar, he's made me an accessory before the fact; if he's not a burglar, he comes about as near being a lunatic as anyone I ever had the pleasure of serving. He's a mystery, that what he is. Anyhow, I've got to keep an eye on him. After all, Number One stands first on the register!'

The Colonel, meanwhile, moved slowly into the

next room, and looked about him on every side with the same studied air of preternatural cunning. Yes, it was Julia's boudoir! The paper was changed, to be sure, and the curtains, and the carpet; but, with those exceptions, the room and furniture remained much the same as he had known them twenty-four years ago. The Sheraton chairs; the Empire lounge; the Japanese cabinet with the inlaid birds; the portrait of Julia's father, by Sir Francis Grant; above all, the escritoire! As he looked at it, he felt it contained what he wanted—the documentary evidence that was bound to make him master of Milworth!

Trembling all over with excitement, he hardly knew why, he approached the escritoire, and began fumbling at the lock with his skeleton key in a tremulous fashion. The wards yielded slowly. The Colonel opened a drawer. A piece of blue paper stared him in the face, with a red embossed stamp of familiar aspect. He took it out and looked at it. So she treasured that still! the forged draft on General Walker! He tossed it aside without a sign of care. It was waste paper now; old Walker was dead, and nobody else could swear to the forgery. Such a capital imitation! His fingers trembled still more as he explored the rest of the drawer. This was clearly where Julia kept her most private papers. He pulled them out one by one—bills, photographs, vouchers. Ha! a bundle of letters—faded old letters, tied with green silk ribbon, and neatly folded. A seal outside! He tore open the covering. These were the sort of thing

now! His heart swelled with triumph. These would prove what she had said that day at the Rothenthal! These would dispossess the whipper-snapper—and make him master of Milworth Manor!

He turned them over and gazed at them. 'Now I have her in my grip!' he cried. 'Marked outside with his name! These are they! These are they! It says, "Letters from Arthur"!'

He drew one from the packet. 'Let me see,' he muttered. "'My darling Julia." How's that for the Probate and Divorce Division? "A kiss to our boy." Why, that's evidence! that's evidence! "*Our* boy," he says—here, in his own handwriting! "Your ever devoted friend and lover," and he's signed it with his name. The fool! A poet!—a poet! She thought it such romance to pick up with a poet!'

His fingers trembled as he ran through the packet. He skimmed letter after letter hurriedly, just grasping their meaning, and, as he read them, one thought grew uppermost all the time in his mind—he would be lord of Milworth and revenged on Julia.

He had not even the usual barbaric feeling of his class. He did not think of the slight upon *his honour*, as people phrase it; he rejoiced to know he could be revenged on Julia. She had kept him all those years on the Continent out of his own. Now, his heel was on her neck, and he would crush her, crush her! And that bastard upstart, who turned him out to-day! He would turn him out in turn—to beg or starve by the wayside!

As he read and read, Fletcher coughed in the next room. For a minute or two the Colonel,

now flushed with victory, hardly noted the signal; but when the detective coughed again, somewhat more loudly than before, he recollected with an effort, and bundling up the letters loosely in his hand, staggered out into the drawing-room.

Staggered visibly now; Fletcher noticed the change as he entered the room again. 'Well, what's up?' the Colonel inquired, with an air of suppressed triumph.

The detective pointed to the park. 'They're coming this way,' he said; 'young Mr Egremont and some ladies and gentlemen.'

'That's my wife!' the Colonel cried excitedly, pointing towards her. 'I've got her under my foot! I've found what I wanted, Fletcher! I've found what I wanted!' He flourished the letters over his head, and then thrust them hastily here and there into his pockets. 'And that's the Italian brigand by her side,' he went on; 'and that's the young jackanapes who's taken my place, and the girl who thinks it's a fine thing to marry him! I have them all under my thumb!' He spoke with thick, loud accents. 'I've bested them, Fletcher! I've bested them! And I mean to make them pay for it.'

The detective looked at him closely. The Colonel's eye was shot with triumph. Was it madness or success, the private inquirer wondered. Had he really found anything, or was he suffering from a delusion? 'Well, you'd better come away now,' the spy said at last. 'You've got what you want—and they'll be back in a minute!'

The Colonel turned to him with fierce exultation.

'Victory! victory!' he cried. 'I've crushed that woman!'

'Then the best thing you can do,' the detective answered drily, 'is to clear out at once, before they come back and take the letters away from you!'

'No, no,' the Colonel cried. 'I'm in my own house again, and I'll never clear out of it.'

'Till you go to Colney Hatch,' the detective murmured inaudibly.

'I'm lord of the manor of Milworth,' the Colonel went on, blustering. 'As fine a place as any in the county of Devon! And now I'm here, I'd have you to know, I mean to stop here.'

'If you've got the letters you want,' Fletcher urged, with professional common sense, 'you'd better go at once. They're coming back four strong, and they'll make short work of you and me, Colonel.'

'No, no,' the Colonel cried, staggering. 'I've found what I wanted, and I'm master of the situation. *J'y suis, et j'y reste!* That's the word for a soldier. This is my Malakoff, and I won't stir out of it. Fletcher, I feel like Nelson at Trafalgar! I've carried my point! I've trampled on that woman!'

'Nelson *died* at Trafalgar, I believe,' the detective said drily, trying to lead him away. The omen appeared to him by no means a well-chosen one.

The Colonel resisted, and reeled more than ever. 'What's that to a soldier?' he cried. He was quivering with excitement. 'What's death—with victory? Do I care about dying—at the moment of triumph? Wolfe died on the field! So did Sidney—and Gordon. I'm Nelson at Trafalgar. These papers settle all. If

she dares to turn me out, I have her at my mercy!' He drew them from his pocket again and brandished them round his head. 'Compromising! compromising! They've settled her!' he shouted.

'Well, what *are* they any way?' the detective asked, with a quiet smile. If there was anything to know, he might as well know it.

The Colonel eyed him suspiciously. 'What's that to you, sir?' he said, the insane secretiveness getting the upper hand once more of the insane ostentation. 'You want to know too much, an underling like you. I'm the lord of the manor, and I shall do as I like . . . with my own women and my own papers.'

He broke into a hoarse laugh. The detective knew what it meant, and chose his side instantly. 'Of course,' he said, scanning him up and down, and speaking in a coaxing tone. 'Quite right and proper. You're the King of the Castle, and who shall knock you down? Still—they're coming along the avenue! You have no time to lose. They'll try to take them from you—those valuable letters—those compromising letters! Hadn't you better give them to me for safe keeping?' For he reflected that the letters were probably incriminating; they might prove a great deal; and if his client went mad, or had a fit on the spot, he could use them himself to sell to Mrs Egremont, or to levy blackmail with.

'No,' the Colonel answered firmly, clasping them to his breast. 'I'll keep them, and defend them! I'm a British soldier. I'm not afraid of your Italian brigands!' He strode about the room, blustering and vapouring. 'I'm a Royal Engineer,' he said;

'finest corps in the world—and a match for a dozen of them! And I'll fight for it; I'll fight for it! I've got that woman on her knees at last. I've got her on her marrow-bones—a sneaking, puritanical skin-flint hypocrite!'

Fletcher seized him by the arm. 'Now, come away,' he said, coaxing him. 'You'd better come away with me.'

'I won't,' the madman answered, beginning to hector and caper about with momentary recovery of the use of his limbs. He pulled out a revolver. 'I shall be even with them!' he cried aloud, pointing it. 'I haven't come unarmed! Trust a soldier for that! If they touch me, hand or foot, I tell you, sergeant, they'll have a warm reception!'

Fletcher humoured him quietly. He saw now he had to deal with a dangerous lunatic. 'Is it loaded?' he asked, with a suspicious glance at the deadly instrument.

'In six chambers!' the Colonel answered, regarding it affectionately.

The detective eyed it with apparent admiration. 'It's a nice weapon,' he observed, with the tone of a connoisseur. He put out his hand and took it. The Colonel yielded it easily. Fletcher pretended to examine it, while the Colonel strutted up and down the room excitedly. 'A very pretty instrument,' he said, eyeing it close. 'With ejector, I observe! The neatest I've handled—and we sometimes have a use for them!' He juggled with it for a moment. 'Ought to settle *their* hash for them!' he went on, handing it back. 'Though, as a man of

peace, I object to firearms. A court of law is safer for all parties. If I were you, Colonel, I wouldn't use the revolver unless absolutely necessary. Revolvers complicate private inquiry.'

'Oh, never fear for me,' the Colonel answered. 'I'm an old hand, you know. I'm a military man! I'm as cool as a cucumber!'

'You look it, *you* do,' the detective replied grimly. 'You'd better keep calm! Remember, no more brandy.'

The madman caught at the word. 'Brandy!' he cried. 'Ha, that's good! I *am* a bit excited. I want something to calm me down—something to nerve and quiet me!' He held out his hand. It trembled violently. 'By Jove, this won't do,' he said. 'Can't shoot straight with that hand. Want winding up again. Where's the key?' He pulled out his flask, and turned it upside down. 'Not a blessed drop in it!' He stalked up and down with long steps. 'Pretty position,' he cried, 'for an officer and a gentleman! In his own house, and kept short of brandy! Wolfe at Quebec—kept short of brandy! I *must* have a drink. If I don't, I collapse—collapse before I've had my revenge upon Julia! I must keep cool, I say, for the sake of my revenge.' He went up to the bell, pressed the knob hard, and rang it violently. 'Electric,' he said, 'electric; put in without *my* consent! But I want some brandy. I'm master in this house, and, by George, I tell you I shall have what I want in it.'

He strode up and down fiercely till the bell was answered. Fletcher in the background regarded

him with cynical indifference. A young footman came up, not the imperturbable Reece. He stared at the Colonel in evident surprise. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said, stammering. 'Did you ring, sir?'

Colonel Egremont turned upon him with a scowl that made the man tremble. 'Yes, I *did* ring, jackass,' he said. 'I should think you heard me. I want some brandy.'

The footman hesitated. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' he began. 'Mr Reece, sir, told me—'

The Colonel advanced towards him with a fierce grimace, brandishing his revolver. 'Mr Reece may go to hell, fool,' he shouted. 'Do you hear what I say? Brandy, BRANDY, BRANDY!'

The man retreated a step or two, and glanced aside at Fletcher. Fletcher signed to him to fetch it. A keeper, no doubt; but still the man hesitated. 'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said again, 'but—I didn't let you in; and Mr Reece gave particular orders—'

The Colonel strode towards him with two very long paces, and pointed the revolver. '*I'm* master in this house,' he cried, 'not Mr Reece or Mrs Egremont. I'm Colonel Walter Egremont, fellow—late Royal Engineers; and when I give an order, by George, I expect to be listened to. I'm lord of the manor of Milworth, and I *shall* be obeyed in it. I'm waiting here for your mistress, who happens to be my wife. And I order you now to bring me some brandy.'

He glared at the man savagely. The fellow, cowed and terrified, answered in a feeble voice, 'Yes, sir; certainly, sir!' and retreated towards the

door. The Colonel glanced after him. 'And mind,' he cried, 'if you bring up that creature Reece instead of bringing the brandy, I shall put a bullet through that ugly fat mug of yours. Do you understand, a bullet—here—out of this revolver. Damned cheek of the fellow! That's the way to treat them! A military man should inspire respect. And here in my own house I'm an Egremont of Egremont.'

He prowled about and blustered. The man-servant came back with a decanter of brandy, a syphon, and a tumbler. He presented them, shaking. 'The spirit, sir,' he muttered.

'I see it, idiot,' the Colonel replied. 'What's this for, fool?' And he snatched up the syphon derisively. Then, seized with a sudden impulse, he pressed the handle and spurted the contents over the man's morning livery. 'Take that,' he exclaimed, laughing. He poured out half a tumblerful of spirit, and tossed it off neat. 'There! That makes a man of me!' he cried. 'That washes out the brain and fortifies the intellect! I can face Julia now. By Jove, this is a triumph! Victory, victory! I'm Nelson at the Nile! I'm Wolfe at Trafalgar! If I don't go mad with it, soon I shall have them on their marrow-bones!'

'You'll have them pretty quick,' Fletcher interposed, with a dry smile. 'For they're coming across the lawn there.'

The Colonel raised a loud laugh. 'Now to disinherit that beggar!' he cried, with fierce joy. 'Ha, ha, ha! I shall crush him! I shall trample on him!'

CHAPTER XX

HIS TRAFALGAR

As they passed the drawing-room window, Mrs Egremont's eye caught a sudden glimpse of a man in a grey tweed suit, walking up and down with evident excitement, and talking loudly to somebody. His head was so erect, his mien so soldierly, his dress so much neater and more gentlemanly than was usual with Colonel Egremont, that for half a minute the terrified wife did not recognise her husband. But Hubert at the same second caught her arm with a meaning touch. 'He's in there,' he whispered, in a voice of warning. 'Take them off to the library!'

Mrs Egremont's face blanched, but she gave no overt sign of her intense agitation. As she entered the house, she led Fede and the Marchese into the room that Hubert suggested, while her son went straight into the drawing-room to face the Colonel. A minute later, with some feminine excuse, Mrs Egremont followed, and confronted the man who had once been her husband. As for Fletcher, he had prudently disappeared for the moment through the open window, and stood watching the scene with attentive eyes from the clump of evergreens.

Hubert looked at the sot sternly. 'What do you

mean by this return, sir?' he asked. 'Must I drive you out again? I told you already you had no place in this house. I shall send the servants now for the police to expel you.'

The Colonel broke into a chuckle of insane delight. 'Don't try to bully *me*, sir,' he cried, in a voice of triumph, 'for I'm not going to stand it. The tables are turned. I have you now in my grasp!' He stretched out his right hand and clenched it hard. 'And I mean to grip you,' he continued. 'I've come here to stop, and I'm not going away again in a hurry, I can tell you. This is *my* house, young man; it shall never be yours. I know the truth. I have proof of it—proof of it!' He chuckled hard once more, and clapped his hand to his pocket. 'A poet!' he cried. 'A poet! "Your ever devoted and affectionate Arthur!" Ha, ha! so you kept them, Julia;—his letters—all these years—you kept them!'

Mrs Egremont gave a sudden wild scream of terror. 'My letters!' she cried, darting forward. 'My letters! In *his* hands! Has that creature seen them?'

'Oh, yes, I've seen them,' the Colonel answered, leering. 'Very nice letters, too! So refined! so poetical!'

She burst into the boudoir in an agony of fear. The *escritoire* lay open, and the drawer was empty. Mrs Egremont caught her breath. A pang seized on her heart. Her letters—those sacred, those tender letters! In Walter Egremont's hands! What desecration! Her blood turned sour at it.

She reeled back, half fainting. 'You have stolen them?' she cried. '*You* have read them?'

The Colonel assumed once more his jaunty manner. 'Yes, I have read them,' he answered, grinning joy at her misery. 'All's fair in love and war. I have read them—very pretty! Such nice turns of thought! He could *write*, that fellow! So you fancied you'd lay them by? Well thumbed, too, they look! Marks of tears here and there! Most agreeable keepsakes!... A poet! A poet! You thought such a lot of him!'

Hubert sprang at the man, angrily, as he stood there mocking. 'You have possessed yourself of my mother's private letters?' he asked, clutching the Colonel's arm.

The Colonel shook him off. 'I have, young man,' he answered; 'and I mean to stick to them.'

'Oh, Walter, how did you get them?' Mrs Egremont cried helplessly, clasping her hands in terror.

Her husband danced about in a frenzy of delight, and snapped his fingers. 'Duplicate key!' he shouted. 'That's all. Felt sure they were there. Mere prudent forethought! Wisdom is justified of all her children.'

'You shall restore them,' Hubert exclaimed, holding him in his powerful hands. 'They are stolen, and I demand them! You shall not leave this house till you have given them all up! I say, you shall restore them!'

'I shall not restore them,' the Colonel answered, unable to free himself, but still dancing with joy in his malevolent ecstasy. 'I decline! I refuse it! They are my wife's letters—therefore mine; and they

shall be read aloud in court, and reported in the papers. "Great laughter!" in parentheses. It's divorce and bastardy—that's the name of the action. All England shall know of this woman's shame. And *you* shall lose your claim to the estate of Milworth!

Hubert held him in his grasp. 'Give up those letters,' he said sternly. With a dexterous jerk the Colonel eluded him. 'I won't,' he answered, dancing about. 'I'll give them up in court, when I read them out aloud to the whole of England, and show up this saint here in her true colours. Fine thing, to be sure, for a woman like her, with her bastard son, to go coming the ascetic over me for years, reading me sermons with her sanctity and her purity! But I'll be even with her yet; *I'll* take it out of her—and then, do you think your pretty little Italian girl will care to marry a beggar and a bastard?'

He hugged himself with wild joy. Mrs Egremont stood facing him, as white as death. 'Oh, Walter, Walter,' she cried, 'are you *quite* inhuman?'

Her son touched her arm. 'You need not fear, mother,' he said, softly. 'Let him vapour as he likes. Let him wear this mood out. It won't last long. The end is coming.'

But the Colonel continued in his heroic act. 'She sees it!' he cried. 'She sees it! She *knows* it's all up with her! I've dispossessed her son. I've ruined her character. I've exposed her intrigue. And now, I'm coming back to Milworth Manor to live with her!'

Hubert advanced once more. 'Give me those letters!' he said, with calm persistence.

'Never!' the Colonel replied, raising his voice to a loud shout. 'Don't dare to touch me, sir. I shall shoot the first man who lays hand on my shoulder. I've a regiment in reserve. Up, Guards, and at 'em!'

As he spoke, the door opened, and Sir Emilius entered.

'Tut, tut, tut, what's the matter with the man?' the great doctor said, glancing at him. 'So! Egremont again? God bless my soul, what's the fellow doing here?' As he looked, his manner changed abruptly from one of remonstrance to pure medical concern. 'Stand back, Julia,' he went on, in an altered voice. 'The man's mad drunk—and worse than that! Don't go too near him. What in heaven's name brought him here?'

'My rights!' the Colonel answered, with a very thick sound in his hectoring voice. 'I've come to claim my own! I'm the lord of Milworth Manor.' He strutted about as he spoke, and steadied himself with a chair. 'I'm monarch of all I survey,' he went on. 'I'm the Earl of Devon!'

'You're a drunkard and a madman, my dear sir, that's what's the matter with *you*,' Sir Emilius said coldly, yet with professional interest. 'What you want is a keeper.' He turned to Hubert. 'This is the beginning of the end,' he added, in a lower voice. 'I suspected it long ago. He's rapidly approaching a state of collapse. Alcoholic insanity.'

'I'm the Duke of Devonshire, I say,' the Colonel mumbled incoherently. 'I'm the lord of the manor.' He waved his hand towards the view with an expansive air. 'I'm the owner of the county.'

Hubert touched his mother's arm. 'Go away, dearest,' he whispered, in a low voice. 'I'll get the letters back quietly. The expected triumph has turned his head. He's going mad before our eyes. You mustn't stop to see him.'

'I can't go away,' the poor woman answered, gasping, 'till I see they're safe. And besides, I don't know what things he may happen to blurt out before Emilius.'

The doctor laid his hand gently on the lunatic's shoulder. 'Come, come,' he said; 'you're not well: you had better go away with me, Egremont. You're indisposed, I can see. A little rest would be good for you.'

He spoke in the persuasive professional manner. But the Colonel shook off the kindly hand with an indignant gesture. 'Don't touch me, sir!' he broke forth, with insane indignation. 'How dare you lay your hand upon me? I'm a soldier, I say. I'm an officer and a gentleman. I'm Wolfe at Quebec. I'm the Commander-in-Chief. I'm a British Field Marshal. Don't venture to interfere with a Royal Highness.'

The doctor held out one deprecating hand. But the madman drew back, with his head drawn down between his shoulders. He sprang at Sir Emilius's throat with a sudden spring like a wild beast. 'Now, then,' the doctor said, shaking him off, 'this won't do, you know, Egremont. You're getting ungovernable. Help me to hold him, Hubert. Julia, stand off: ring the bell there, quick! We must have Reece to take care of him.'

The doctor gripped him. But with the strange

adroitness of the insane, in spite of his paralysis, Colonel Egremont wriggled suddenly out of that quiet grasp, stood three paces off, and drew his revolver. For a second, Sir Emilius and Hubert recoiled at the sight of so deadly a weapon in the madman's hands—for that he was a madman indeed they had now no doubt. 'If you touch me, I fire,' he cried, raising it, and covering Hubert as he spoke. 'Now, clear the decks for action! Forward the Light Brigade! I'm the General in command. England expects every man to do his duty!'

There was no time to be lost. At all hazards, they must secure him. Sir Emilius approached him cautiously from one side. Mrs Egremont shrank away with a terrified look at the revolver. Hubert faced him, ready to pounce. But at the same moment, Fletcher, who had been quietly watching the development of events from outside the window, saw the psychological moment arrive for declaring himself. He stepped into the room with an air of business-like decision. 'Don't be dismayed,' he said calmly, seizing the Colonel's arm. 'Don't trouble to take it from him. It isn't loaded. I saw to that. I took the precaution to withdraw the cartridges.' And he drew them out of his pocket and showed them.

The Colonel, not noticing him, turned round fiercely, and snapped the trigger at Hubert. It gave an abortive little click—no more. He looked at it curiously. For a second he turned it over like a child, astonished. 'What, no cartridge!' he cried. Then he flung it away from him and rushed upon

Fletcher. 'You villain!' he exclaimed. 'You've betrayed me!' He turned to the others. 'Choke him, soldiers, choke him!' he burst out. And he grasped the man's neck in his hands as if to strangle him.

Hubert and Sir Emilius darted forward and secured him. But the detective was prepared. He drew a set of handcuffs quietly from his pocket. 'I always carry a pair of these about with me,' he said, in an apologetic tone. 'They *do* come in handy. In *my* profession, one never just knows when one may happen to want them.'

The two other men held the madman's wrists. Fletcher slipped on the handcuffs like one well accustomed to them. The Colonel raved and blustered. He hardly seemed to notice the little episode now, so wild was he with excitement. 'What does it matter?' he cried, triumphant. 'I've got the title-deeds of the estate this moment in my pocket!' He held up his handcuffed hands. 'How dare you?' he said, maundering. 'I'm the Duke of Devonshire! I'm the Earl of Trafalgar! I'm Nelson at Quebec! I'm Wolfe at Milworth Manor! I'm—I'm—I'm the Commander—the Commander—' He began to dodder suddenly; then all at once he collapsed and fell back on the sofa.

He fell in a heap, like a drunken man. The detective leaned over him. 'Let *me* take him away,' he whispered. 'I brought him here, you know, and I disarmed him when he gave me his revolver to look at. I've been like a keeper to him. He'll go quietly with me.' For he reflected that the

letters, whatever they might contain, were in the Colonel's pocket, and that no other chance now remained of repaying his expenses.

'No, no,' Hubert answered, determined at all hazards to retain the letters. 'He can be cared for here. You need not trouble.'

Sir Emilius, meanwhile, with a doctor's instinct, had unloosed the madman's collar, and was fanning him with his handkerchief. 'This is a hopeless case,' he said slowly. 'He is in utter collapse. Give him air there, Hubert! Julia, quick! a fan, and sal volatile if you have any!' He lifted the Colonel's fainting body in his arms, and tore his coat off. Hubert snatched it, and, searching the pocket unobtrusively, took out the packet of letters, which he handed to his mother. Mrs Egremont received them without a word, slipped them into her bosom, and rushed off distractedly to find the sal volatile.

Sir Emilius watched his patient with close attention. 'He's in the very last stage,' he murmured. 'Hold his head up, Hubert! Suppressed insanity, breaking out all at once. I've always expected it. He's not fit to be at large. Send Reece post haste for any local doctor. We must sign a committal order, and get him into an asylum.'

'An asylum,' Mrs Egremont cried, returning, and just catching the words. 'Oh, Mill, is it that? At once? At once?' A certain womanly remorse seemed to come over her for a moment.

'It won't be for long, mother,' Hubert answered, in a soft voice. 'He has killed himself at last. This collapse is final. I knew it was coming. Only

brandy kept him up. The excitement of the return, and this scene, have finished him.'

Sir Emilius was rubbing the Colonel's cold hands meanwhile. 'You're quite right, Hubert,' he answered, low. 'He can't live six weeks. And meanwhile, he will be nothing but a helpless imbecile.'

As he spoke, the Colonel's eyes opened, and he stared about him vacantly. Then he lifted himself on his elbows, and gazed around with a distraught air. 'I'm the Earl of Devonshire,' he muttered feebly. 'I'm Duke Nelson of Trafalgar.' Then he lost his balance and fell back, mumbling.

'Take those things off again!' Sir Emilius said in an authoritative voice to Fletcher.

The detective obeyed, and unfastened the handcuffs. Colonel Egremont felt his hands free, and lifted them up with an effort. His eye caught Sir Emilius's. 'Ha! Rawson, old boy!' he mumbled, smiling at him. 'You were always my friend, Rawson. Do you remember, when we two were boys together at Winchester, on a half-remedy afternoon, down by the playing-fields—' He broke into a fatuous smile, and left off suddenly, laughing.

Sir Emilius looked at him with compassionate eyes. 'Poor fellow! Poor fellow!' he said. 'He's all gone to pieces! He has been a blackguard all his life, Julia, and he has treated you like a blackguard. But, 'pon my soul, when one sees him now, one can't help pitying him. To think a truculent bully should be reduced to *that*! He needs no asylum now, my dear. He won't want restraint. He's past any violence. A good home, where he

can be nursed and tended while he lasts, is all he will require. Come this way with me, Egremont,' and Sir Emilius lifted him tenderly. 'He'd better go to a bedroom, and lie down and rest for an hour or so. Then I'll take him off myself to a home that is fit for him. The collapse, when it comes, is always final.'

The shadow of the Colonel rose feebly and clutched Sir Emilius's arm. He was smiling a bland smile. 'Yes, I'll go and lie down,' he said, with an abortive laugh. 'And then you'll take me home, Rawson! Milworth's looking nice! Fine boy that of Julia's! You'll see me home, I hope. I'm a bit screwed, I think, and you'll see me home, Rawson, won't you? Ha, ha, ha! old boy; you and I were always good chums together, weren't we?'

He tottered out of the room on the doctor's arm. Hubert and Mrs Egremont followed them silently at a little distance.

'Send Reece to help me upstairs with him,' Sir Emilius said, in his quiet way. 'He must rest here for an hour or two; then Dr Wills and I must take him over by road to that nursing home at Exeter.'

They carried him upstairs. Outside the bedroom door Mrs Egremont broke into a sudden flood of tears. Hubert led her into her own room. There she sat down on the sofa, buried her face in her hands, and cried to herself in silence.

Hubert seated himself by her side for some minutes without a word, just smoothing her cheek with one hand, and holding hers with the other.

At last he spoke. 'I know what it is, dear,' he

whispered. 'Some last tinge of needless remorse—now you see him dying.'

Mrs Egremont bowed her head. 'The ages behind me, I suppose,' she answered, half sobbing. 'One cannot wholly escape from the false creeds of one's ancestors. Though *he* would have told me I ought rather to feel the acute disgrace of having lived for one day, as wife, with that creature!'

Hubert paused again a second. 'Mother,' he said earnestly, 'on the morning you first told me that great secret in Switzerland, I said to you, "Thank you; ten thousand times, thank you!" Every day since that time, when I reflect from what inheritance of vice and madness you saved me, I have said again in my heart, "Oh, thank you, thank you!" Now I see him lying there, where his own wicked life has justly led him, I say to you yet more fervently than ever, "Thank you!" You have preserved me from *that*; you have given me a father and a heritage to be proud of!'

Mrs Egremont clasped him in her arms. 'I will go to him,' she said slowly. 'I will do what I can for him. Now, run down again, darling, to the Marchese and Fede!'

'I will,' Hubert answered, pressing her forehead with his lips. 'For, more than all, mother, you have given me Fede!'

THE END

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